

# NIGHT-SHIFT



To  
LOUIS GOLDING  
*who sees in small things  
the possibility of greater*

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# NIGHT-SHIFT

*By*

RICHARD BLAKER .



SERVICES



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*The author is indebted to his friend, Charles Percy Iron-  
Bridge Abbott, for the loan of the site on which to erect  
his Garage. The other characters of the story are fictitious  
and their actions are intended to cast no aspersion on the  
personal character of Mr. Abbott, or upon the ethics of*  
**THE TRADE**

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## CHAPTER I

WHEN the proprietor of the "Never-Sleep" Garage was forty-five he was willing to admit that the name had in it a touch of vulgarity or commonness or Babbitry or Rotarianism—or whatever else you might choose to call that thing which once used to make the difference between a tradesman and a gentleman.

But an admission of this sort would no longer bother him; and there the Garage now is, on a road that is neither a great arterial road nor bypass, but is, nevertheless, a road of considerable width and traffic: and the "Never-Sleep" remains the Garage's name.

Apart from the special branch of snobbery whose province it is to decide whether the name is, or is not, vulgar, the name is a good one. It tells its full story; and it tells it from dusk till daylight, a full half-mile away, by means of a ruby glow in the sky above the pallor of a flood-lit and austere crag of concrete and plate-glass.

It was late one Friday evening in a recent autumn that a particular car swung off the road to the territory of the Garage and pulled up by the first of its half-dozen petrol-pumps. The car's requirement for the moment, however, was not for petrol; and so, after the pump-boy had answered two or three questions, it purred into movement again and passed through the entrance beside the dimly lighted showroom into a glare of light, and the throb of belts and machinery heard through steel doors.

There it stopped, and the driver got out while the pump-boy hurried to the cubicle by the workshop door and summoned the night foreman.

The pump-boy had known from his first glance at it, and so the foreman knew even better, that this was no accidentally-owned car, but a carefully chosen one. Observers other than a petrol-boy and a garage foreman would have looked at other details to obtain the information that the car owner was a man of careful taste, and of means also. They would have looked at the ends of his tweed trousers perhaps; at his shoes and overcoat and gloves. Even those who looked at his face would have seen that there was a man who carefully chose the things he possessed, and who was in a position to possess most of the things he chose. It was clear, too, from his smile and



the general ease of him, that the choice and the possession pleased him.

"I want to leave her," he said to the foreman, and nodded towards the car, "till about ten o'clock on Monday morning. I'm told you work on through the week-end here. It'll give you two clear days—and three nights; if you really *do* keep going under full steam all the time."

"Yes, sir," said the foreman. "It's quite right. We do. What is it wants doing?"

"Brakes for one thing," said the owner. "New linings. I've brought a set, in case you haven't got the right ones in stock. And decarbonise. And there's a suspicion of a knock I want you to listen to before I go. I've got a few minutes before catching a train at Ealing."

"Very good, sir," said the foreman. He had been listening with one ear to the words spoken by the man, with the other to the whisper of the engine. "I fancy I can hear the knock. It may be no more than a valve."

He unclipped and raised the bonnet and remained in thought over the engine till the telephone-bell rang in his cubicle. At this sound the taut solidity of his neck and stooping shoulders dithered suddenly away, and he leaned for a moment with a hand on the radiator-top like a man suddenly grown old. He mumbled something and walked as far as the door of his cubicle. But he hesitated there. Instead of going in he pressed a bell-push on the doorpost. "Very likely not for me," he said. "There've been a dozen in the last hour. . . ." He came back and stooped again over the engine, but without absorption in his listening. He looked from under the peak of his cap at the mechanic who came from the workshop beyond the steel doors. "'Phone, Charlie," he called to him. And when the mechanic had wiped his hands and taken the receiver, he continued to watch him and to listen, not to the knock that might have been nothing more than a valve-stem in its guide, but to the quite inaudible words of Charlie in the cubicle.

Charlie, in the glass-box, took the receiver from his ear and placed it on the high desk; and the movement was enough to straighten the foreman—if the forcing of a bent body into an approximate perpendicularity that has weariness in every line of it can be called a process of straightening. He mumbled something: "I . . . sorry, sir. For me.



... Be a minute ...” but he need not have mumbled a syllable of apology. He was too obviously sorry to be leaving the car for the telephone.

The owner of the car switched off the negligible sound of his engine and lighted a cigarette.

The foreman leaned his elbows on his desk. Obviously it was the earpiece that was the important part of the telephone for him. He stuffed this hard against his ear and spoke just vaguely, anywhere, knowing that his words would somehow find the telephone’s mouthpiece standing on the desk in front of him; and that even if they did not, it was no great matter.

The car owner watched him, displayed as he was in a box of glass, in the light of the immense globe above him and concentrated upon him by a shade that shaded naught but the distant girders of the roof structure, and the night that brooded over the glass above them. The foreman for his part stared up, full towards the globe, frowning, not at the glare, but at the weariness and the perplexity in which he stumbled and mumbled the words that might or might not find their way to the telephone’s mouthpiece.

He hung up the receiver. He moved his hand up as though to run his fingers through his hair; but abandoned the gesture when he found that he was wearing a cap. Then he went out. There was a moment’s pause, and it was an impulse that looked like a sudden recollection of something long forgotten that sent him hurriedly towards the car he had left.

“Here, Hales,” the owner said, “have a cigarette,” and offered his case.

The man took one with suitable thanks before remarking: “You’ve got my name quite pat, sir.”

“Yes,” said the other quietly. “I’ve heard about you. That’s why I’m leaving my car. I’ve been told you’re a good man at your job. Some mechanics—even some foremen—aren’t.”

“Thank you, sir,” said the foreman. “You know a customer?”

The other shrugged his shoulders and said casually: “At the club or somewhere.” He moved round to the front of the car, perceiving that his explanation or his evasion had been wasted; for Hales was obviously deep in his own thoughts.



"Well," he said, jerking himself suddenly away from them. "I'll just start her up again."

He did so and listened. The other, too, leaned a little forward. "There!" he said. And again: "There . . . There."

Hales said: "Yes, I hear it all right."

"What do you think it is?"

Hales, instead of answering, went to his cubicle and came back with a rod. One end of this he snuggled against his ear, moving the other from cylinder to cylinder along the engine-side and then as far down as he could get it against the sump.

"Well?" asked the owner.

Hales said: "If you'll leave her, sir. . . . A bit later. . . ." Then he swung away from the car and said: "Can you tell me anything, sir, about—cancer?"

The other was startled. He had aimed at a complete dissociation of himself from cancer for a stretch of two full days, an afternoon, a morning and three nights. He had felt, for the past two or three hours, that he was achieving it. And now Hales, the warmly recommended diagnostician of wheezes and gurgles in the bowels of a sick machine. . . . He wondered, for a moment, what the fellow was at; and he was sorry he had admitted ever having heard of him. He said, casually, "Why should I know anything about cancer?"

Hales expressed no surprise. "Because, by God," he said wearily; "*someone* ought to." He paused. "It's the *pain* that gets you . . . the blasted pain. And you can't do a thing. From morning till night, not a bloody thing."

"But, my dear fellow," said the other, looking at him and smiling, "let me assure you that whatever else you might have, you have *not* got cancer."

"No," said Hales. "Granted. But my wife has. Phone message from the doctor. He'll be ringing up again in a couple of hours, when he's been on to the hospital, about an operation at last. Well . . . if you'll leave the car, sir, and the linings, we'll get on with it. And if you'll leave that little knock to me . . . I'll just get a job-sheet." He was moving off towards his cubicle again.

"Wait a minute," said the other, and switched off the engine. "I'd like to hear some more about this. My name is Kempthorne—*Kempthorne*. As it happens, I'm con-



sidered rather a biggish man on cancer, just as some people think you're a big man at engine knocks. I might be able to do something; even if it's only pulling a wire or two. How long has it been going on?"

"Oh, first it was just indigestion," said Hales; "then *acute* indigestion. Then one thing, then another; and different bottles of medicine all the time. The only thing that was *never* different was the pain."

"I know," said the other. "It can be pretty awful. And now?"

"He's going to ring up. If there's room in the hospital they'll operate at once. He's had a second opinion this evening. That's what I've been waiting for."

"What hospital?"

"Our own hospital here," said Hales, and the other said: "H'm!" Then he said: "I suppose it's your panel doctor?"

"Yes," said Hales. "Dr. Thompson."

"Thompson?" said the other. "Not, by any chance, Roger D. Thompson? Slim little chap with ginger hair?"

"I believe it is R. Thompson. I don't know about the D.," said Hales. "But I'd call him pretty stout. Small enough, but fat. I've never taken particular notice of his hair. It may be lightish, but there isn't much of it. No; he's pretty bald, sir, and wears glasses."

"Well, if it's Roger Thompson, the odds are it's Roger D. And if it's Roger D., it's Ginger; and we're old friends. I don't believe I've actually seen him for thirty years; but he was the hospital fly-half, and I was in the scrum. I'll speak to him, and see if we can do anything."

"But what can you do?" asked Hales. "What can anyone do—except look on?"

"Well," said the other, "—we can do it—we have done it—sometimes. It's worth trying. I'll ring Ginger Thompson up."

"He's out for a couple of hours now," said Hales. "He told me so. And you've got your train to catch."

Kempthorne looked at his watch and at the clock above the workshop fire-doors. "I know what we can do," said he. "We'll go along and see your wife, and I'll speak to Ginger—to Dr. Thompson—afterwards. I can make it right with him. We were quite particular friends thirty years ago; he won't mind."



"Are you a cancer specialist, then, sir?" Hales asked. "The doctor said some time ago, if we could afford a specialist——"

"Yes, I am a cancer specialist," said Kempthorne. "But it's quite a wild idea some people have got about specialists. There are some specialists to whom I would not send a sick cow. Any more than I'd take my car to certain very swagger garages. Yes, I'm a specialist. I've worked at cancer, and at nothing but cancer, for twenty-five years. If that is any comfort to you, Hales, let's go."

"But your train?" asked Hales.

"Oh well—we'll see about that. There—we—instead of catching the train, I daresay we can run out a few miles in the car. You've got someone who can bring it back?"

Hales thought for a moment of the possibilities in the workshop. He looked at the car as he thought of them, the car that lived as yet only as a desire in the mind of young Charlie, for instance, who had answered the telephone; of Nosey Parker, whose particular genius was for spot-welding; of old Stubbs, who could use the vulcaniser as no one else on earth could use it; of him whom they called "Curly" by reason of the absolute baldness of his head. They 'could drive'—every one of them. It would have been approximately true to say that they 'could drive anything'. But if that car had been the property of him, Hales, would he have placed its wheel in the hands, its accelerator under the foot of any one of them? He would not. And the peculiarity of any and every car in relationship to Hales was that as soon as it reported its existence to him in the workshop a deed of gift, of transfer and surrender was immediately performed, and the car became, in the mind of Hales, the property of Hales.

Therefore he said: "What time is your train, sir?"

The specialist said: "We'll manage about the train. Can you come at once to see your wife? Have you got to ask for permission or anything?"

"No," said Hales. "I'm in charge. The governor's gone out for the evening. He lives upstairs, and I'll tell him when he comes in. I'll go and put a chap in charge of the shop." He started towards the workshop doors.

"Oh—Hales," Kempthorne called him back; "I say—don't tell anyone why you're going. I mean, tell them if



you like, but leave me out altogether. I'm on holiday at the moment. . . . Just don't particularly want my name handed about, and all that. See?"

"Very good, sir," said Hales. "I quite see. And it's—I won't try to start saying how thankful I am."

"We'll leave that, too," said Kempthorne. "I might be able to do nothing. Nothing at all. Is your wife *sick* a great deal?"

"Not now," said Hales. "It's only the pain."

"I see," said the other.

Hales went into the workshop, and Kempthorne followed him as far as the door.

It was perfectly true that the "Never-Sleep" workshop was as busy by night as it was by day. A very simple question had once presented itself to the mind of the proprietor: Why pay very substantially for a place for twenty-four hours a day and use it only for eight, nine, or even ten? It was true that power and light cost money—but they cost less than wasted rent or interest.

The workshop was one where the only difficulty about a job was the actual doing of it. There were no traps set for striving men, nothing lying or hanging about to catch them or snare them, nothing to trip them into pools of dirt and puddles of oil. At a glance you could see that the finding of a particular tool—a sledge-hammer or a magneto file—would present no puzzle to the workman.

Hales moved quickly from one bench to another, and addressed as Charlie and Tom and Vic the various feet and buttocks and hands that protruded from under the running-board of one car, from the door of another, and from the illuminated pit under a lorry. He spoke to Curly and finally to Hargreaves, and came down the shop again to Kempthorne.

The specialist congratulated him on his workshop. "It's not me," said the foreman modestly. "It's the Governor. He's a caution."

"Oh?" said Kempthorne.

"And not an engineer by a million miles," said Hales. "Doesn't know the first thing about the real doings of a car. He told me he was a painter once. That was his training. Pictures—faces and trees and that. But you don't need to know much about cars to run a garage and repair-shop, if the mechanics do."



"That's very sound," said Kempthorne. "Too few people in the world recognise the truth of that, Hales. Too few. . . ."

Hales said abruptly, when they were near the car: "Have you got anything with you, sir—just in case—to stop the pain? Or to ease it off a bit?"

"You poor chap," said Kempthorne. "It must be pretty bad."

"It's got me *down*," said Hales. "Beat. If I could *do* anything. . . . But I'd better not tell you the things I sometimes think I could do. *Ought* to do by rights. But there you are. You can't do it. Even if you had the guts, you couldn't."

"I daresay," said Kempthorne. "I suppose it does seem, sometimes—with your *wife*."

Hales could not allow the universal and terrible truth to be overshadowed by an individual circumstance. He shrugged his shoulders. "After having her for thirty years," he said, "a wife is just a good pal or a wash-out. You can put up with her, or you can't. Mine's the first kind; a good sort. And to see her tortured the way I seen it—to have to go back to see it at the end of every shift here—and to be able to *do* nothing——"

"But, my dear chap," said Kempthorne. "You know, you're putting yourself forward rather too much into the picture. You're beginning to feel sorrier for yourself than for the poor woman who really *is* the injured party."

"Oh yes, I know all about that," said Hales. "The Governor said something like that only yesterday—told me I'd go loopy if I didn't look out and get a bit of a holiday away from it. But you can't get away from it. You would think that here, in the shop, my mind would get taken off it for twelve hours a day. There's one other foreman, and we do twelve each—and the wife won't let me stay at home. But my mind can't get taken off it. It does get away for a bit, till someone—a lady driving in, or one of those boys—just mucks something up; strangles the carburettor when the engine's hot and the mixture too rich already; forces the gears; or tears at the steering with the car standing still, or lets the clutch in with the brakes on—and then I see the car sort of twist up with the pain of it. It's God's truth, sir. I *see* it, I tell you. And I hear it trying not to scream out; and that's a bloodier sound to listen to than



any screaming. When I was trying to hear the knock in your engine a minute ago I couldn't hear it for that other sound. So . . . You *will* give her something—if we find she's having a bad spell?"

Seldom had Kempthorne seen fear so abject as the fear in this tough, oldish man about to go home to his wife. He tried to comfort him. "Some people," he said, "are more hurt by the pain of others than the others are themselves. Now, if you had the pain—inside yourself, I mean—you probably wouldn't turn a hair."

"I daresay," said Hales. "But that's neither here nor there. Mind, I don't mean that it isn't kind of you to take all this trouble and try to help a chap. But the only thing to do is to kill that pain. It's got me *down*."

Curious phrase, Kempthorne reflected, watching the expression in the shadow cast upon the face of Hales by the peak of his cap. "It's got me down . . ." it was curiously accurate; for the fellow was obviously and utterly beaten. . . . The unimaginative man tortured into the achievement of hearing moans and screams and stifled sobs in the roar of machinery, of seeing a spasm of writhing in rigid steel. . . . Was it altruism that brought a man to this?—or egotism of the worst and wildest sort? Anyhow, there it was, to knock the mechanic's mouth drooping a little open, to fix his eyes in a sightless stare at the cement of the floor, or unflinching at the filament of a thousand-watt lamp. "Loopy" was the man's own word for it. . . . And "It's got me down . . ." an idea fitted so accurately and fixed by a group of words in the sick mind, so that another idea would have to be found, and as accurately fitted, by another group of words to set the man up again. This was not, strictly, in Kempthorne's line; so what he said was just something thrown out for Hales to get on with for the time being. "Well—if you would be better off having the pain yourself, Hales, remember that your wife is *really* better off than you are. See what I mean? You're not so badly off. It's not so bad as it seems. . . ." He saw what an idiotic mess he was making of it; confusing and fuddling the poor fellow—arguing with a drowning man about the art of swimming instead of tossing him something small and neat enough for him to take hold of; something that would float.

"Come along," he said. "Let's go. I must do some



telephoning in half an hour or so, to tell some people I'm going to be late."

## CHAPTER II

KEMPTHORNE went upstairs to the bedroom in Hales's little house and questioned Hales's sister. He looked only at the face of Mrs. Hales, and felt her pulse. He uncorked the medicine bottle on the mantelpiece and sniffed its contents and licked the cork. He smiled. And then, with Hales directing him, the two went to the Memorial Hospital.

His card was taken to the R.M.O. Hales, waiting in the car outside the hospital doors, saw the R.M.O., in his flannels and blazer, coming down the stairs three at a time. He could see the youth's willingness to shake hands with the visitor and his unwillingness to thrust his own unworthy hand forward. He saw things being made easy for Kempthorne: a door being first indicated to him with a gesture that had in it something of a courtier's bow and something of a guardsman's salute, and the same door being opened for him with an usher's alacrity. Through the window of the room into which the door opened—for the room was the hospital's office immediately on the right of the front door—Hales saw telephone directories being offered to the visitor. He then saw the R.M.O. being—by some gesture which was imperceptible because it was the mere acceptance of one personality by another—amiably dismissed.

The young man took the dismissal easily, and came out smiling into the light over the porch. There, when he had lighted a cigarette, he looked at the visitor's car. In expelling the smoke that was in his lungs he softly whistled. He was checked for the instant in which he saw that the car was occupied, but came on again when he saw that the occupant was Hales, since the machine he himself drove had recently brought him fairly regularly to the Garage. It had become a monster that consumed a gallon of petrol in thirty-three miles, and a gallon of oil in a thousand instead of doing forty-five to a gallon of the one and apparently nothing of the other. Often had he disputed with Hales—slowly turning the engine over on the starting-handle or looking at the exhaust while the engine roared—whether new piston-rings would perhaps do the trick.

"What are you doing in here?" he asked Hales. "I



thought this must surely belong to his nibs." He nodded towards the lighted window of the office, and the figure bent and smiling over the telephone.

"He's brought her down for me to see to a little knock somewhere in her," said Hales proudly. "He's just fixing up something with Dr. Thompson about my wife."

"I know," said the R.M.O.

"So Dr. Thompson's told you?"

"Dr. Thompson?" said the R.M.O.; "No. He hasn't got here yet. Due half an hour ago about something or other, blast him! No, my dear Watson; it wouldn't be about a sprained ankle, or wisdom-tooth trouble that our Mr. Kempthorne concerns himself." But he checked his good humour. "Awfully sorry to hear about your wife. You may be sure we'll do everything here, every mortal thing that can be done. And, by God, I congratulate you on your choice of doctors. It's as sound as his choice of mechanic—and his choice of bus." His eye wandered again along the vista of bonnet. "They must be marvels!" he murmured. "I've never seen one like this before—not to speak to."

"They're the right stuff all right," said Hales; and added: "—in the right hands. What've you decided about your car, sir? Going to fit the new rings?"

"No," said the R.M.O. "The rings are probably good enough. Fit a new car."

"You've caned her," said Hales, shaking his head. "This last six months——"

The R.M.O. interrupted him. "That's where you're wrong. This last six months I've nursed her like a baby. Couldn't do enough for her—hand-swing her every morning; let her tick over quietly till the oil's all on the run, make a regular Amami night over tyre-pressure and brake-adjustments and battery inspection. No. There never was a better mother—now. But I've got to admit that in my youth—her youth—*our* youth—you know what I mean; young love, and all that. Well, I suppose I did knock her about a bit, but she enjoyed it as much as I did. . . . And now we must pay the price. I must be getting old myself, Hales; for every wheeze and squeak and moan in her grabs at my heart-strings. Or else it's the medical gent in me working to the top . . ." and he stopped short again, at the surprising thought of Hales with a wife who had cancer.



Of the wife herself he did not think—not yet. To-morrow, or the next day, or the next, he would think of her—as soon as she had become a bed-number in his hospital. But, for the time being, what suddenly congested his thoughts was Hales himself; for Hales, in the briefest terms, was a rum individual. He said little enough at any time; now he said absolutely nothing. He was oppressed and bothered to the point, obviously, of mental staggering. The oppression and bother had been enough to bring off the miracle of the visit of Basil Kempthorne and yet Hales emanated some peculiar kind of sympathy—even for twaddle about a very ordinary little bone-shaker while sitting at the spring-loaded steering-wheel of one of the world's great marvels. He wanted to tell Hales in some way that things were seldom, or never, as bad as they seemed; that he himself for one would shoulder something of the black and heavy burden that was Mrs. Hales's cancer. He said: "I suppose it's the car that's given you the pull with the best man in England—in the world, I expect—on cancer?"

Hales said simply: "Yes."

"Well, you're lucky," said the other. "Damned lucky. I don't know what he's going to do. But if there's any man who can dish out a spot of radium when it's wanted, and when no one else can, that man is W. Basil Kempthorne. Rather sporting of a chap in his position to run a bus like this. I suppose he *does* drive himself?"

"Yes," said Hales. "And I don't know of anyone who could drive him better. But she's garage-kept, all right. And a good garage, too, by the look of things."

When Kempthorne had finished telephoning they saw him light a cigarette and look at his watch and move restlessly about the room. "I'd better go in," said the R.M.O., and he flung away the end of his cigarette. "Oh, by the way, if and when Dr. Thompson turns up you might just mention to him that W. Basil Kempthorne is inside, fraternising with me. It'll give the old boy something to go on with. I'll take his nibs over the place, if he'll come, and show him some of the things *we* can do."

The R.M.O. and the specialist talked for a few minutes in the office and then disappeared from Hales's view into the further territories ruled by the young man in flannels and blazer.

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Dr. Thompson knew most of the individual cars and also the general type of all cars that spent any time on the gravel standing-place in front of the hospital doors. Seeing Hales step out of the stranger as he pulled his own car up behind, he was relieved by the thought that Hales would tell him about the visitor before he need ask the confounded Matron.

"Well, Hales——" he began, as Hales opened his own door for him. But Hales immediately said: "Excuse me, sir. If you won't mind my asking the question, did they ever call you Ginger—in your young days?"

"Yes," said Dr. Thompson. "There are some who still do. Not many, though; and we don't meet often. Why?"

"A doctor was asking," said Hales. "This is his car. He's inside with young Dr. Carruthers. A Dr. Kempthorne."

"Kempthorne!" said Dr. Thompson. "Basil Kempthorne? Kemmie Kempthorne? And he remembered me?"

"Yes, sir," said Hales. "It's you he's come here to see. I'd just had your phone-call at the Garage and I told him about it. And when I told him you were my doctor, he said he'd like to see you. I didn't know he was a doctor when I told him——" for in the profession of Hales also there was an etiquette which ruled that damage must not be done—to jobs or to proper feelings—by noising things abroad and by discussing with one man the job of another.

"Thanks, Hales," said Dr. Thompson. "But if you *had* known that it was Basil Kempthorne there'd have been all the more reason for telling him. He is *Mister* Kempthorne, by the way; not Doctor. Well—I'll see him." Doctor Thompson stood by his running-board with his hands, as far as the thumbs, in the pockets of his overcoat. Hales could see that he, too, was eager to hold one of them out to be shaken by Kempthorne, but was reluctant to thrust it at him. It was the same reluctance that had held him back from any movement towards the rising specialist for thirty years.

"He'll be very pleased to find that it is Ginger Thompson," said Hales, as his doctor went up the steps.

He felt easier now. It was some years since he himself had cracked any sort of deliberate joke; for joking had never been in his line. But he was now in the frame of mind that would have welcomed such talk and such com-



pany as the young Resident Medical Officer's. As a master craftsman he had perfect confidence in the work of other masters; and among these, obviously, was his new friend, the crony of Dr. Thompson. Somehow it had never struck him that Dr. Thompson would chance to have such a man among even his acquaintances, any more than that he was likely to drive anything above or apart from twelve to fifteen h.-p. saloons in the hundred and eighty-pound neighbourhood.

Thus Dr. Thompson had already achieved a miracle, and since it was only from miracles that Hales had begun to expect any relief from the burden that was making of him a cripple, he was suddenly happy. He drew a packet of cigarettes from the waistcoat pocket where packets are least likely to be squashed by a man who for years had been ready to crouch, or to lie or roll in the limited space under a car. From ancient habit, although his hands were clean, he opened and shook the packet till a cigarette projected far enough for his lips to take it without any touch of his fingers—since neither paraffin nor petrol nor lubricating oil adds anything desirable to the flavour of tobacco. He filled his lungs with smoke and flung it into the air again, waiting.

Carruthers, the R.M.O., soon did come out to him, and he came as though the staircase of the hospital and its entrance-steps had been the barrel of a piece of ordnance.

"By God, Hales!" he said. "You are a lucky one! I haven't heard everything, because I cleared out and left them to it—days of their youth, 'what's become of old so-and-so,' and all that. But I heard enough. He's going to take your missis into his little radium clinic. If the ambulance can be wangled, she's going to-night. If not—tomorrow. Can you beat it? D'you know, I believe you're the illegitimate son of a duke or something, with all this wonderful pull you've got with the big ones of the earth."

"To-night?" said Hales; the glory of the miracle was for the moment obscured by the matters of small fact that still were in the way; such a fact, for example, as that one who was tortured in lying still in a bed must first be moved from the bed to a stretcher, carried down a steep stairway, shoved into an ambulance and then driven a dozen miles. In that dozen miles were five of tram-lines in paving-blocks of wood and of stone. Then he thought again of the miracle,



—so that these intermediate jobs became facts accomplished. "If there's any bother over getting the ambulance out," he said, "I could drive her up myself. The Governor won't be back again till after twelve, but I could get him on the phone and ask him for a couple of hours off."

"That," said Carruthers, "is just absolutely where you're wrong. They wouldn't let you do it. That is one of the things I did hear. His nibs said, and I don't mind telling you, because your own medical adviser is going to tell you himself, with flowers—you're as near as damn it to being a complete nervous wreck. You're the worst thing in the world for the patient in your present condition, and the sooner she's got away from anywhere near you, the better chance she'll have. So you can just forget all about your idea of driving the ambulance."

Hales sniffed. "It wouldn't be the first time I've driven an ambulance," he said, considering the sombre fact that when he was actually driving an ambulance this Resident Medical Officer of the War Memorial Hospital had been a nipper at school. "And the roads were a bit different then," he added. "And the lights."

"And the passengers," suggested Carruthers; "they weren't your wife. Anyhow, they're pretty concerned about you, those two, and they wouldn't hear of your doing it."

### CHAPTER III

AN hour later Kempthorne had hung up his cap and overcoat with the air of a man come home: but the stand upon which he hung them was not in the home of any man, but in the corner of the restaurant of the "Silver Horseshoe" on the Maidenhead By-Pass. Before hanging them up he had shaken hands—one of hers in both of his—with a woman who sat waiting for him at a corner table; and it was from the moment of the handshake that the home-coming manner had come upon him.

A waitress looked in upon them from the door and went away, which was explained by the woman's saying, when Kempthorne had sat down, "I've ordered, my dear; to save time. I didn't know how long you were going to be, and we don't want to be *too* late getting there, do we?"



He smiled and took her hand again and leaned over it and kissed it. "If we were married," he said, "I suppose you would be fuming and indignant at my having kept you waiting; and I suitably apologetic and abject; and trying my damndest to convince you that only the most important case in the world could have kept me. Something with fortunes of money in it—instead of just your wonderful mechanic's wife. And I'm just purely and utterly delighted to see you. It's glorious of you not to mind."

"I hope you didn't let Mr. Hales into the secrets of your life as easily as he let you into his," she said. "Was his wife there, at the garage? Or how did it all come out? I've seen the man, so has George, about once a week for the last five years; and he never told us his wife was ill. We didn't even know he had a wife. . . ."

"I just happened to catch him rather on the hop," Kempthorne explained. "She was very far from being at the garage, poor thing. And that's lucky for your Hales—if the fellow's sanity is of any value to anyone."

"Such a devoted husband?" she asked.

Kempthorne shrugged his shoulders. "I've been wondering about that," he said. "As a husband under normal conditions I'd say he was fairly average. But as a humanitarian under considerable strain he's very nearly broken. And that brings you to the point where altruism becomes the wildest egotism—where a man has become so obsessed with his own feelings about it that he can no longer bear another person's pain."

"Poor creature!" said she. "Is it as bad as that?"

Kempthorne nodded. "Thompson agreed: and he's been watching him for some time."

"Thompson?" said she. "My dear—you surely haven't been spending the evening in making friends with Dr. Thompson, too?"

"No," said Kempthorne. "Ginger Thomspen and I were friends thirty years ago. It was just a chance."

"I daresay," said she. "But George and Dr. Thompson are the greatest friends. Golf every second Sunday. And George isn't such an idiot; if he were to hear that you are a visitor to the garage when he happens to be away, he *might*——"

She did not complete the thought. She seemed to deal with it with a certain amount of interest, but no fear.



"Well—he would hear," said Kempthorne, and shrugged his shoulders. Again he leaned over the hand and kissed it. "I'm convinced—I'm *still* convinced—that chance works these things out much better and much more easily than we could."

"In the meantime," said she, "what shall we do about the cars? You know how thoroughly I agree with you, my dear; but I don't think that our arriving at the Trout in two separate cars could be called a chance. Even stopping somewhere to garage one of them for the week-end is rather asking for it."

She said these things; but quite obviously she did not care much about them.

"Do you think," said Kempthorne, "that even the Stoic, the Spartan and the Thebaid ascetic who sits beside you now could drive one car under the moon that shines to-night while you drove another within sight of him? Hales has taken back the car, of course, as arranged, to find that knock and reline the brakes."

At this she laughed. "Oh, my dear!" she said, "blessed indeed are they who have realised that what is coming to them, comes. Hales! . . . For him to have seen my car here means more than his having seen me, myself. Me he might not have recognised, for I am just a woman. But the car—oh, my dear——" and again she laughed.

"By Jove!" said Kempthorne. "——of course the beggar might have noticed her; but it's fairly dark out there, and there was another car beside her. . . ."

"But you recognised her," she suggested, and she was still full of laughter for him. "It was not too dark for that and Hales knows her better than you do."

Kempthorne was for a few moments quite unresponsive to her laughter, thinking of the possible bothers she was suggesting. Then he shrugged his shoulders again. From his shoulders the gesture of carelessness passed to his features. Smiling, he said:

"You have spoken. Blessed indeed are they . . ."

He told her, while they drank their coffee, of the queer fish that Hales seemed to be; one of those solid, stolid hunks of humanity with the hide of a rhinoceros—and a spot, somewhere about them, that could detect a pea through a dozen coverlets of eiderdown.



## CHAPTER IV

DR. THOMPSON and young Carruthers went together to Hales's house late that night, to meet the ambulance and see Mrs. Hales into it. This was by no means a normal act on their part, for Carruthers had plenty to do in the hospital and Dr. Thompson plenty outside it, without concerning themselves with the mere packing and transportation of the materials of their craft.

But the case of Mrs. Hales was no ordinary case. Even without the appearance of Kempthorne on the scene, it had developed an importance of its own beyond the importance of an ordinary cancer case in a large panel practice and in a hospital of sixty beds (with one resident and four visiting surgeons). The case's peculiar importance came from the importance to both Dr. Thompson and to Carruthers, of Hales. It amounted in their minds to no more, perhaps, than that both of them made a point of keeping their car-troubles, whenever possible, till evening, so that their consultant at the garage should be Hales, who came on duty at seven. Theoretically (and possibly practically) the day man, Winter, was as good as Hales; but the simple fact remained that Hales was the one they preferred. Carruthers himself had not noticed any signs of breaking-up on the part of Hales; but then, he had not known of the existence of the man's wife or her illness. When he heard Kempthorne and Thompson talking of it he began to remember things about Hales which he had not, until then, noticed. The look of the fellow (which same look Carruthers had casually put down to severe pyorrhoea) he now saw was the result of a neurotic exhaustion. He had been touched from the very first, and in some fantastic and quite inexplicable way thrilled, by the very simple thought that Hales, over a period of years now, had worked solidly and conscientiously during the hours in which he himself, with almost all the world, had slept. Moreover, and in short, there was something about Hales that he liked. So he went quite enthusiastically, although he was no tiger for work, with Dr. Thompson, to get the mechanic's wife into the ambulance and pack her off to the spare bed in Kempthorne's famous clinic.

The same sort of reasons prompted Thompson. When the ambulance had gone the incident, for Carruthers, was



closed. He actually said, as they took their seats in Thompson's car, "Well, I suppose we can call it a day. I'll just do my last prowling round and turn in."

The older man, however, had not the same easy feeling of having finished with something. Two sayings of Kempthorne's had reminded him that there were things he had never taken the trouble to finish, but had merely abandoned and forgotten.

"I've lost sight of you, Ginger," Kempthorne had said, "for about a dozen years. I used to see an occasional paper of yours in the *Lancet*. Then—I suppose it's about twelve years ago—you did that interesting thing in the *Journal on Intercostal Lesions*. I meant to write to you about that; I had some notes which might have been useful to you. But you know how things go. . . . And—well—I'm afraid I've seen nothing by you since. That's the worst of specialising; you get so slack. You keep your nose down to your own grindstone and don't seem to have the time, or the guts, to keep in touch with what's going on outside; reading papers and all that."

Slack! thought poor Thompson. Kempthorne slack!—with three standard text-books from his pen and his un-resting brain. . . . He accepted the great man's apology with some suitable sound in his throat, when the truth was that that little paper on Intercostal Lesions in the *Journal of Surgery* had been his swan-song. Since the writing of that article he had gradually, but steadily, dropped "method" from his work; so that now, face to face with a man no older than himself, whose "method" of research was a by-word ("The Kempthorne Method") Thompson was ashamed. He, Thompson, had developed into a slap-dash drudge. The routine of adenoids, tonsils, normal epidemics and midwifery had knocked most of the excitement and thrill out of recording cases and his treatment of them. Cases that had turned out, in the long run, to have any individual interest, had usually started in the manner of something quite ordinary and dull. By the time they showed anything worthy of a scientist's analysis and recording, the analysis and recording of its earlier stages would have been a farce of guessing and of cudgelling a memory fogged by routine and tiredness. And sheer business rivalry: new men coming into the place, buying junior partnerships and putting up plates of their own. . . . The



case of Mrs. Hales was a case in point, treated at first with the more or less obvious pot-shots at her appendix, her colon, her gall-bladder. . . .

"It looks like being really interesting," Kempthorne had said: "You must come up and see me one evening, Ginger. We'll dine and chat over the history. It's all very well just stuffing radium-needles into people at this stage; or chopping bits of them off and throwing them away. But we've got to get back; back; *back* to the beginning, before we can hope to know what really is at the bottom of it all. Bring your notes."

His notes!

He could, perhaps, with his memory and his copies of some prescriptions, his entries in his day-book—and in the ledger, since Hales had insisted that this business was extra to the Panel—from these he could, perhaps, assemble some account that should be approximate, and also plausible to a brain like Basil Kempthorne's.

He wondered if any handicap had stood in the way of Kempthorne. He smiled and decided they had not been as his; for men who have shouldered and carried the weight of a family do not look as Kempthorne had looked—lean and erect and bright, like big-game hunters and mountain-climbers and explorers. They look fattish and somehow pushed down, and dulled on the surface. They do not dress as Kempthorne dressed; their clothes are either obviously new or obviously old, and never just absolutely right. They do not drive cars like Kempthorne's—things with the gloss and the grace and the pace of a greyhound.,

No. He was willing to bet that Kempthorne had no worries, and never had had worries of the ordinary flattening and dulling sort. Shooting off in that great car of his for a week-end in the country, breezy and quietly magnificent, as though a couple of days of golf or shooting or rural loafing were the normal due of every man. He knew that money had not built Kempthorne into what he now was; for Kemmie had been, in hospital days, as memorably hard up as any of them. Nothing had come to him, except by work and worth. And so he still admired Kemmie, without any stint or reservation; and he was intrigued by the sheer chance that had brought them together at the same point in friendship where they had snapped off thirty years before.



Kempthorne had explained the chance quite casually ; the agitation of Hales at the telephone and his mention of the name of Thompson. From Hales to himself the movement of Kempthorne was clear enough ; but it was the chance leading Kempthorne to Hales that was obscure, and mildly interesting. It was difficult to believe that a man would bring a car from the middle of London to a garage twelve miles outside because someone, whose name he could not even remember, had spoken highly of one of its foremen. It was not that he had any particular curiosity about the private affairs of Kempthorne. It was just that he found the explanation of his bringing his car to the "Never-Sleep" incredible.

So he said to young Carruthers, "I'll drop you on a tram, if you don't mind. I want to look in at the garage on my way home. Poor Hales will be glad to know she's been fixed up."

## CHAPTER V

HE drove in past the petrol-pumps and asked the boy to ring the bell so that the doors might be opened for him to go through to Hales's cubicle. Hales started at the sight of the car, but the doctor waved his hand to him reassuringly and called, "It's good news, Hales. The best in the world. We've sent her away, quite comfortable ; and she's in better hands than any of ours. There isn't another man like Kempthorne, nor another clinic like his. You can sleep to-night—to-morrow I should say—as you haven't slept for months. Kempthorne will pull her through. And there'll be no—no more talk of an operation." He hoped that Hales, knowing nothing that did not relate to machinery in action or at rest, would interpret "no operation" as "no pain". But all that Hales said was, "That's a good job, sir. Thank you."

"Look here," said Thompson, "you come round to my place in the morning when you knock off. I'll have something made up for you, to give you a good sleep. It won't do you any harm."

Again Hales said "Thank you." The words did not imply whether he would drink the draught or whether he would not. They implied only that he would not argue.



The doctor proceeded then to chat with him; to tell him stories of Kempthorne as a rugger player and of the name of Kempthorne in the annals of cancer and research. He did a lot to cheer him up; but out of him he got no change whatever. He got, in fact, even less than he thought he was getting. For when he said, "By the way, what did you do with Mr. Kempthorne? He said he was going to get you to take him somewhere," Hales said, "The station."

If, in driving into the yard of the "Silver Horseshoe" and out again Hales had not glanced upon the number-plate and the luggage-boot of the Quail two-seater, which he knew intimately from its front bumper to its tail-lamp, he would have told the simple truth. But having seen that number-plate and luggage-boot, he preferred the simple lie. There was no carefully-made or elaborate selection about it. It was just like taking the little extra trouble required to walk round a ladder instead of under it; like blowing out a match instead of lighting a third cigarette with it. It was just keeping on the safe side of things, instead of running vague risks, which no one ever pretended to understand.

All that anyone could have said about this particular one was that there was Kempthorne, himself a miracle of a man, turning up with a suit-case at a place where someone with a car was to meet him; and there, at that place already, was the Quail two-seater, with accommodation in its stern for the suit-case. It was perfectly true that there was another car there also, a stranger to Hales, and large enough to collect four Kempthornes and half a dozen of his suit-cases, it was also true that millions of people walked under ladders and took no harm whatever therefrom. But there were also authentic cases of bad luck following the walking under ladders; there, also, had been the Quail.

And so, after stating glibly that it was to the railway station that he had taken his benefactor, he went on to elaborate it. "We found he could just get a train, to make a connection."

"Oh," said Thompson, "where to?"

Hales said, "A friend was meeting him somewhere. He looked it up for himself. I didn't catch the name of the place."

It would not, at any rate, be through him, Hales, that possible discredit or harm should come upon the driver of the Quail.



For, as nearly as ordinary human man can attain to love for a women, Hales, for four or five years, had quietly and peaceably loved her who now drove the Quail. She was the wife of a customer of the garage named Hudson, a man with some prosperous occupation in the city who frequently went North for a few days at a time, when one of the men from the garage went with him to the station to bring his own car back and 'service' it during his absence. He was away on one of these expeditions now; and for this individual Hales had no affection whatever.

There was something in common between him and Hales's colleague and 'relief', the day foreman, Winter. It was obviously more than mere accident that brought this Mr. Hudson to discuss jobs on his saloon during the daytime and Winter's tour of duty, about as consistently as Mrs. Hudson brought the Quail after seven in the evening, when Hales was in command.

She had not always driven the Quail.

For the first three years of his love for her, he had known her as the driver of the old saloon, seated beside her husband. For the husband was one of those to whom a car is a means of getting from one important place to another; for whom the driving and the tending of a car are a menial job, and whose own vile technique in the performance of it is a statement of their opinion. It was Mrs. Hudson, then, who used to drive the saloon in during pre-Quail days, the chauffeur of her husband; the dull and pompous fellow against whom you could find nothing to say, yet was one whom the pump-boys mimicked so accurately and joyfully that Winter was the only man in the world who could effectively squash them. In mimicking him there was nothing specific upon which they could fasten. One of their formulæ was, "You'll see to it for me then? Good man. . . ." They said it with a sudden blank unsympathy on their features, their smile being as stiff and as meaningless as the top of a bowler-hat. Another was, "Right, my dear. Shall we carry on?" It showed that Mr. Hudson had been in the war; and it showed who was boss, without time to waste with mechanics and petrol-boys.

Yet you could not exactly say of him that he was a snob, and so be finished with him; he sometimes came, with Mrs. Hudson, to dine with the Governor in his rooms on the roof of the Garage; and although those rooms were



no ordinary flat, but a marvel, and although the Governor himself was as fine and as obvious a gentleman as anyone—as, for example, Kempthorne—he was, nevertheless, a garage proprietor; and real snobs do not number garage proprietors among their friends. But if it was not snobbery (and it certainly was not boorishness, for he was always civil enough) that stuck him up, and apart, what was it?

God only knew. But there it was.

It saddened Hales, and had saddened him for five years, to think of Mrs. Hudson married to him. It would have saddened him to see a thoroughbred in harness with anything but another thoroughbred. It was as though the fellow were going through life missing-fire, moving only because he was induced to move, putting a dead weight and strain on other cylinders wherein the ignition was perfect. That, in fine, was the point on which Mrs. Hudson caused such men as Hales to love her; her perfect and unfailing ignition. It was, otherwise, her vitality; her own capacity for love, since love for her had not consisted in any matter of finality, such as appropriating a male, making a father and a flunky of him; and inspiring him thereafter, by some mystery as obscure as the peace of God, with a sense of gratitude. It consisted in something that went on inside herself as an enjoyment of objects for their own sake. These objects could equally be the bright cunning and alacrity of the pump-boys, the sardonic slouch of car-washers, the smooth snick of a good change, up or down, of gears: or the thoughtful, welcoming smile of Hales himself. At the age of forty she simply, and for no particular reason, had not got tired of life. She still liked it. And she liked Hales, recognising him, as she said, for a genius.

One evening, about two years ago, she had pulled up before his cubicle, in the brand-new Quail.

Expertly she avoided its negligible running-board, lowering her foot straight to the ground before losing her contact with the low driving-seat. Another woman with a family the age of hers, and most men, would usually make a mess and a contortion of their exit from such accommodation. But with her it was a smooth, single gesture. Her head in the neat, close hat she wore, cleared the lintel with inches to spare; and the curves from ankle to thigh were taut and



clean in their work of taking the load of her and swinging it erect, as the other leg and foot flashed out of the cockpit—a shimmer of stocking and twinkle of a massive buckle on a robust and sensible shoe.

“Look, Mr. Hales!” she said. “I had to bring her round for you to see. Isn’t it a present that *is* a present? A darling old bachelor uncle insisted on giving it to me, and he lives at Bournemouth. That’s why it couldn’t be bought from you. Now, if you know any really nasty things about her you mustn’t tell me them. I’ve driven her a hundred miles to-day and I think she’s perfect.”

She was, somehow, like a boy standing there, talking to him a little breathlessly, tremulous with her pride and delight in the darling old uncle’s present.

“They’re a very nice job, ma’am,” said Hales; “—*now*. They’ve been a nice job for the last two models. Ever since they got a designer into their works from a place that knows how to make engines.” He paused a moment. “I’ve heard that the gear-box——”

“Please. Please. *Please!*” said she. “You must let *me* say it, because I won’t listen to it from anyone else. I admit that the change is noisy—as yet. I just haven’t quite got it. But I will. You must show me.”

“Any time that’s convenient to you, ma’am,” said Hales.

“I suppose,” said she, “that just at this particular moment, you’re very busy?”

“Not at all,” said he. “I could go out for a bit.”

He fetched from the store a newly-laundered cover which he flung over the driving seat.

He opened the near-side door for her, and she was in as easily as she had got out—no scuffling or squeezing and bumping. She made, in fact, a neater job of it than he did; for his waist was becoming a joint less universal than it once had been.

“‘Reverse’ is your side of the gate,” she said.

He nodded.

“Starts sweet enough,” he said, when his thumb had found the button; “and ticks over nicely.”

“I pretend that you can’t tell whether she is ticking over at all,” said she; and somehow this kind of affectation did not offend, as affectations usually do. It was obviously the only way in which she could deal with her exuberance.

. . . A darling old bachelor uncle, Hales reflected. Not



that husband of hers. And it was not, he noted, to that same husband that she went for a discussion on gear-changing, and to let off steam generally about the loveliness of her new car.

"Did you bring a full load up from Bournemouth?" he asked.

"No," said she. "I was alone."

He thought so. He could not see that husband in anything but the dinner-table sort of seat in a portly and snobbish old saloon.

"And wild horses wouldn't drag out of me what speed she touched. It was wicked, I know—before being run in. Perfectly wicked. But only for less than two miles, on that stretch before Camberley. Do you think it really does do an engine any harm?"

"No, ma'am," said Hales stoutly. "Absolutely none. Not in proper hands. The makers always say that just to protect themselves. But just a couple of miles—on a decent road—no harm at all, I'm sure. What you really want to look out for at first is the oil."

"Oh, she's simply *bathed* in oil," said Mrs. Hudson.

He backed and then swung forward out of the Garage, after shouting "Back in a few minutes" to a boy at the pump; and they were away down the road.

"Oh," his pupil observed, "you go a lot faster than I've been doing, before the change."

"Always rev. well up," said he. "It's easy enough to drop it if you've got too much."

And thus he fostered in her that with which she seemed to have been born, a sense of the ratio of engine-speed to road-speed throughout the range of her gears.

The concealed morsel of bulb that illuminated the dials on the instrument-board illuminated also her shoes and her ankles, and the curves of her shins and her calves, that gleamed as high lights in a sheath of stocking.

He changed down for her—she twisting her head round to assure him that all was clear behind them—to show how there need be no murmur of protest in the gear-box, nor jerk in the transmission, even on the flattest road and at speeds of twenty-five or fifteen or forty. As she watched his feet at their conjuring with clutch and accelerator, illuminated by the same light that illuminated her own, he regretted only that it was his unvarying practice, on arriving at the



Garage each evening, to unlace and kick aside a pair of leather shoes and assume, in their stead, a pair of canvas ones, whose whiteness was now a matter of history only. They were filthy.

Then he changed up; slowing up, stopping and doing it again, till she said, "Now let me try."

He got out of his door, taking his canvas cover with him; and she slid to the driving-seat from hers, with again no hitch in her movement from the obstructions of brake or gear lever.

When they were back at the Garage there was no embarrassment of tip-offering. There was just her glow of appreciation of his skill and understanding, her love of whatever fun there is in changing gear correctly rather than causing metal to screech against teeth of metal, in linking one rhythm to another rather than banging a moving thing against a resting one.

She thanked him and he said it was quite all right, and a pleasure. She smiled then, and drew his attention to the continued spotlessness of the canvas cover which was now over his arm. That, he said, was a rule of the Garage, because you never knew.

She said, "In two days from now, Mr. Hales, I shall be as great a swell at it as you are. If I ever make a noisy change again I'll die of shame. Because I know now that there's no excuse for it, except idiocy or laziness—like jerking a horse."

\* \* \* \* \*

This then was she, of whom Winter, the day man, had once said, "Hot stuff, or *I* know nothing . . . I bet his nibs has bitten off a bit more than he can always chew"; it was the same Quail two-seater that he had seen in the yard of the "Silver Horseshoe", waiting for nothing in particular or else for the lean and peculiarly twinkling Kempthorne; thus, when Dr. Thompson asked him where he had taken this Kempthorne he answered very glibly, to suggest precisely the opposite direction: "To the station."

## CHAPTER VI

THE canvas shoes upon his feet when Dr. Thompson had called were the same that had disgraced him two years



before; and when he had settled himself on the stool in his cubicle with his feet on the rungs of the stool occupied during the day by Winter, he contemplated them for a moment, and contemplated also his lie to the doctor. They would pair up well together, those two—and that was as far as his thinking carried him in their direction. Whatever they had in common, leading him to this conclusion, was a vague and general impression on him, as of sunshine rather than dull and dirty weather; of a smile, rather than glumness or boredom, seen on a passing face. The man's approach to the trouble that was Hales's own had been a clean swoop, as graceful as the movements made by Mrs. Hudson's body as she slightly leaned to move the lever from second to third, or her mind as she grasped some simplicity which he pointed out to her, about cleaning the distributor-cover or tightening up the packing-gland of the water-pump. And if the man Kempthorne could deal with cancer as gracefully and as magnificently as he approached it—but at that point Hales's thoughts grew cold and sluggish, and were soon utterly dead.

He realised that he did not even know yet where his wife had gone. He had omitted to ask, and to get the telephone number so that he could, even at that moment, have rung up and enquired how she had stood the journey. She would have liked that. . . . But then, he was fairly sure, she could not know anything one way or the other, for hours yet, since Dr. Thompson had told him that he had put her "well under". And then, when she did know anything, it would be nothing but that same old pain. . . . Through the maze and the mist and the unspeakable mess of this pain he and she had been able to do nothing for months but make little gestures of good-will, and of faith in something concerned with one another. And he did not know, in the sum of it all, whether he wished her dead. He just did not know; for he himself, whenever he thought of it, was dead.

He sat for perhaps an hour staring at his canvas shoes and a file of folders left behind by travellers and sorted and classified for him and Winter by the Buying Department. He heard the occasional clang of the indicator-bell on one or other of the petrol-pumps, the "Good-night, son," from a lorry driver to the petrol-boy, or the engine sound



and vocal silence as a private car was filled and went its way.

For an hour, staring at his shoes and listening to the night sounds, he saw and heard nothing. He was a true and perfect altruist: when the weight and sharpness of personal matters attained a pressure and a poignancy beyond a certain point and pitch he merely—but quite completely—ceased to exist. He had ceased now. The point and poignancy had been reached, and some valve within him had 'blown off'.

The buzzer on his desk sounded. The Governor was back in his rooms upstairs; and he had forgotten about the Governor. He took up the telephone and said, "Yes, sir. Hales."

"I want you to come up, Hales," said the Governor.

His key admitted him to the back of the showroom, and the bulb above his cubicle and the glare by the petrol-pumps in front, gave him all the light he wanted on his way. There was just one complete family in the showroom at the moment—a 'Twenty', a 'Sixteen', a 'Twelve', a 'Ten' and two 'Babies'. Inside each of them was a tiny light giving a cosy allurements to upholstery and interior bright-work. The 'Baby' Sports, however, stood aloof and unlighted from within, stocky and trenchant and grim. It would still be there in the holidays, no doubt, for Mrs. Hudson's boy from school to look at.

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The Governor's 'Flat' at the top of the building was a bungalow in every respect except that its floor was four storeys above the ground instead of upon it. The lift delivered its passengers into a porch that opened upon the narrow hall which ran the length of the three rooms on each side of it.

Instead of garden surrounding the verandah was the lead flat of the Garage roof. The four-foot balustrade enclosing this screened the bungalow completely from the ground level for a radius of a couple of miles.

The Governor had been known to his more intimate friends since the age of twelve as "Nooks", for the simple and sufficient reason that his name was Ingle. There were few now, however, who called him this, since it was as "the Governor" that he lived most of his life in the speech



of others, and as "Dear Sir" or "Gentlemen" in their writings.

This Garage had begun to grow, twelve years before, out of the last quarrel in which he had been induced to take any active part.

At the age of about thirty-five he went into the war as an infantry subaltern. He was already a portrait painter with a steady income out of the routine work of painting municipal officials on the point of retirement from long and devoted service, headmasters and mistresses of decent and not very well-known schools, directors of sound, small companies—and sometimes of dogs. During his holidays he had painted landscapes and occasionally sold a few of them.

About half-way through the war his battalion was sent to India. Certain advantages of pay and allowances had been duly advertised and he managed, in spite of his advancing years, to be transferred to the Indian Army Reserve of Officers. After the war it was found that the list of these officers was enormous, out of all proportion to the requirements of Empire. They had been recruited, however, on a very exactly-defined contract, so that handsome compensations had to be offered for their retirement. Ingle accepted these on the scale to which his rank of captain entitled him, and came home with the loot.

For four or five years he had been rather forgetting his wife. The years had presented him with time for thinking on a general and generous scale, and had developed in him a critical faculty which had never before had a chance.

He wondered a little, therefore, at the peculiarity of the arrangement whereby his wife should be waiting for him on a Southampton quay after an interval of years, for no particular reason except the vague one that they had been married about a dozen years before. Much as a drowning man is said to see his past in the short period required for his last few gulps of brine, Ingle saw his marriage as he waved his hand to his wife and stepped down the gangway to embrace her. He saw it, however, not as mere pictures and records of facts—all of which were pleasant enough—but as questions. He had a shrewd suspicion as he adjusted the ball of each foot to the slats on the gangway that she, too, must have been faced by a similar array of posers, as she stood there waiting for him; and it



struck him as a silly shame that two decent human beings should be so bothered.

It was only for a very few days that he could refrain from announcing that the stretched canvas measuring thirty by twenty-two, the faces of the Borough Councillor and the pedigree Airedale had ceased to hold any interest for him.

He had kept the announcement out of his letters, because he had never been absolutely sure that he wanted to make it; and because, also, he was a gentle and decent man and wanted to see first how the land lay.

It worked out more smoothly than he, or any man, could have expected.

"I really will pack up my things and get them out of the studio to-day," his wife said after they had been together for about a week, "you will never feel you can get back to work till I do."

Her "things" were an enormous writing-desk with a lot of papers on it, a very small one bearing a typewriter, a small table and a filing-cabinet. These pieces of furniture had been a surprise to him; for although he knew that she had, for three years, been writing countless articles for newspapers, and occasional short stories, he had not visualised any particular and massive equipment as necessary for the craft of writing.

"It's your studio, old girl," he said; "now, henceforth and for ever."

Somewhat to his amazement she expressed no surprise. She only asked, "What will *you* do?"

For the sheer, idiotic fun of the thing, he said, very solemnly, "Write." His back was turned to her.

Now she did express surprise. "Write? My dear Charles . . . write—what?"

"Oh—just a few plays," he said; "novels, poems. You know the sort of thing—real, world-shaking stuff. It must be"—he made a gesture with his hands in the air, as he turned to face her—"Big."

His sneer was the whole point of the joke. She thought (and, no doubt, still thinks) that it was at herself he sneered. But it was not.

She said nothing, wondering what would be the best use to which she might put the anger which she could feel rising into a great force. He had finished sneering now, because his thought was focused upon herself as he watched



her. He said—"You are, thank God, a most effective woman."

She ought, no doubt, to have observed the smile that had taken the place of the sneer. She ought to have felt the caress of it. But she did not.

Very coldly she said, "Thank you."

"What I mean to say is," he explained, "you're thirty-eight and you've got every bit of the good looks you had at twenty-five; the same lovely figure—perhaps a bit more so, and you seem to have got it all in hand somehow. And you've acquired a lucrative profession." She thought this was another sneer.

"There are people," she reminded him, "who think rather highly not only of my profession but of my particular work."

He retorted, not because he wanted to be quarrelsome, but because it seemed quite logical, "There are people who thought—and still think—highly of *mine*." With his thumb he went through the motions of sticking blobs of paint on canvas. And again he sneered.

"Since when, may I ask," she said with great hauteur, "have you developed this magnificent contempt for Art?"

He gave some thought to his answer: "One could say that it crystallised last night," he said, "in the bilge with which this same room was filled—by the old lot, with dear old Harold among them, and the young jackass who sat on the cushion and talked about the Revival of Ballet."

Then, or a very few seconds after, they began to quarrel. He attacked a whole section of a whole world; and she took the whole attack as being directed upon herself only. "Bilge" was the polite word current in those days for the later "Tripe", and he used it freely and effectively. He told her that he had lived his entire youth out on bilge, and now no longer had a stomach for it—or for its merchants and purveyors. "Your own friends," she reminded him, referring to the few who had come to spend the previous evening with them—Harold Smale, the art critic and occasional novelist; Hilary Vine-Smith, famous for her miniatures of children; Hugo, the poster-man; Dick Farnham, who had a fairly steady half-page drawing a month in *Punch*; and Reggie Deacon, who was virtually the inventor of the dodge of making buildings look impressive by drawing them with vanishing points about six inches, instead of



six feet, above ground-level. (Though the boy who had talked offensively about the Revival of Ballet did not fall, strictly, into the class of his friends, Ingle allowed him to stand because Hilary Vine-Smith, perhaps the oldest of his friends, had brought him.)

"*They* can't help it!" he said, "and all power to them, as far as I'm concerned. I just happen not to like it any more. If they would only stop talking about pot-boiling and admit that they're doing their very best—and getting handsomely paid for it——"

"You yourself always talked the same way—worked with your tongue in your cheek—despising your portrait-jobs—doing the work you really wanted to do only on holidays."

"Which is fallacy number one in the silly scheme—being able to work only on holidays. Can you beat it?"

"The fact," said she, "is that you are not, by nature, an artist. To the real artist it is only creation that matters."

"Oh, don't," said Ingle. "For the love of God, don't! We had enough of that last night; and during the period nineteen-three to fourteen. It makes me sick."

"You are not an *Artist*," she repeated.

"I'd like to know what you mean by that!" he demanded. "All these windbags—old Harold and the rest of them! I can knock spots off the lot of them; and they admit it."

"I daresay," said she; "and that's the curious thing about it. You *can* paint. You *have* painted. And you've never seemed to care for it; not as an artist would care. We've often wondered——"

"Who has wondered?" said he. "Whose business is it but my own to wonder about these things?"

"I have ventured to wonder, myself," she said, caustically.

"But that doesn't form a quorum," said he. "Just you yourself isn't *we*. Harold, I suppose, has offered his opinion?"

"Harold is very fond of you."

"That's nothing to trade on. I'm very fond of Harold, but I would never insult him by asking him to enjoy writing the stuff he writes, or wondering why he doesn't enjoy it."

"Harold's opinion of your work—and your possibilities—has always been high."

"And I repeat, it's none of Harold's business," said



Ingle. Then, more thoughtfully: "But we're getting away from the point; which is that I'm finished with being bored. For years—all my adult life till the war—I've slaved at painting pictures, drugged into a stupor by them and bored to hell, like an old lady with a bag of knitting. I've had no youth, till the war. Oh yes, I know. . . . I don't want to seem ungrateful, Margery. You and I—it was great fun, that."

She looked at him, with the cold focus of anger. She said, "Oh, great *fun*, was it?"

"Could you ask more, of anything?" He asked in quite genuine surprise.

"Yes," she said. "I could. And I do."

"Well," he said. "Then it's no use asking *me*."

"I'm not asking you," said she.

"Or anyone else either."

"Surely," said she, "that is a matter for me to decide?"

And he said, "Surely."

They were stuck again; and yet, obviously, they had got nowhere. And then a sudden idea struck him.

"I say, Madge!" he exclaimed. "Is there someone else working on that line?"

"Aren't you being a little vulgar?" she said, "not to say coarse?"

"Oh, come off it, my dear!" he said, impatiently; "and do, for the Lord's sake tell me—is there?"

"Suppose there is," said she; and so certain was he now that there was, that he laughed aloud as he stepped across to her and took her face between his two hands.

"And here have I been *worrying*, and *worrying*, and *worrying* my blessed head off. All for nothing!"

"What, precisely, do you mean?"

She waited till the pressure of his hands had become lighter, so that she could withdraw her face from between them without any of the scenic business of having to raise her hands to his wrists, to push him away. She did not want a scene. She was too angry; and there were certain specific things she wanted to get said.

"I mean," he said, "that I need not have worried at all—at least I hope not; because I don't think you would be sucked in by an ass or a tout—something that would make it impossible."

"Make what impossible?"



"This 'fresh start in life' business that we've agreed upon." He was quite unconscious of the detail that they had not, in fact, agreed upon anything; but that was the measure in which he always took things for granted. He continued, "In the unusual sense of the word, Margery, I love you. I could not just let you go—any-old-where. I just want to be sure that you're not making a change for the worse. If, for instance, it happened to be dear old Harold that was inspiring——"

She stopped him, with a sudden jerking of her eyes into his own. "If you're trying to be funny——" she began; and then became cold again; "Well——" she said, "if it does happen to be Harold——" but his exuberant sense of relief positively stopped her.

"God!" he said; "what have I done to deserve this? Some men are crushed and broken utterly and for all time by the single disaster of their sex. And here am I, at forty, as absolutely unscathed as a homosexualist or a hermaphrodite; relieved of all responsibility for the one I have loved—and, damn it, always *shall* love, and enormously admire. . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

They parted, as the saying is, "friends".

Living peaceably on under the same roof while their respective "arrangements" were made was a little beyond Margery; so he humoured her to the extent of finding lodgings for himself in Chiswick. The sale of his expensive studio-paraphernalia easily paid for the farce of Margery's divorce proceedings; so that, even in cash, his exit from the state of matrimony cost him nothing.

There had been, in the ordinary sense, no "issue" to his marriage with Margery. But it seemed to him one day as he drove a very old two-seater car along the Uxbridge Road, that it was he himself who had been suddenly born of the union. It was a most satisfactory kind of birth, for he was fully grown and was immune to all the diseases and distempers of human childhood and adolescence—having suffered them and survived. The absurd invisible cord that had fastened him to the society that had bred him was at last broken. Obligation to be bored was gone. Not only need he never paint again; but he would never feel that when he was not painting, or thinking about painting, he was skulking and wasting time.



The question of what he would do, instead of painting and thinking about painting and listening to talk about painting, did not greatly concern him; for the new-born are not greatly concerned about their ultimate destiny.

He just bought a second-hand two-seater car and pottered about in it, looking upon the world which he had never seen before from the outside.

One day, on the Uxbridge Road, this car ceased, without any warning at all, to function. Its dead wheels had insufficient run left in them even to carry him close into the side of the road; so Ingle got out and pushed her up against the kerb. There he made the only investigation within his technical scope: he saw that there was petrol in the tank and in the float-chamber of the carburettor. Thus, as far as he was concerned, the car had no intelligible or reasonable excuse for stopping. Ingle had decided, at that time, that there was no sense in trying to reason with the unreasonable: so he filled and lighted a pipe and sat down in the car. He must have sat for about an hour when he was noticed by a man in a passing tram, and the man happened to be Hales.

Ingle was sitting for the greater comfort of his legs and feet, away from control pedals and steering column, in the passenger seat. Hales, looking at him and his car, reflected that this was not the kind of spot where a driver was likely to leave a passenger for a few minutes and himself disappear. Disappearance was impossible: there was a high railway embankment on one side of the road and an unscalable wire fence between the other pavement and an utterly bare stretch of golf course. It was not a place, therefore, where any car would stop with a purpose.

Hales was due to get out of the tram a few hundred yards further on in any case; so he stopped the tram and got out and crossed over to Ingle.

"Trouble?" he asked, "or waiting for some juice?"

"Plenty of juice," said Ingle. "Just conked out, dead, quite suddenly; and refused to budge."

Hales raised the bonnet. He saw the ready drip from the carburettor. He pulled at the leads to the sparking plugs. Then he went to the starting-handle and swung the engine.

"Just turn her over a couple of times," he said, and as Ingle got out of the car, Hales felt in the pocket where



most men carry a fountain pen and produced therefrom a small screwdriver. With this he tried to get a spark at the plug terminals while Ingle swung the engine; for self-starters were not in evidence in those days on second-hand, cheap cars.

"Dead as mutton," said Hales. "Got a mag.-spanner?"

Ingle produced his bag of tools from under the seat. It seemed to him that it ought to contain what the man wanted. It did; and in the course of a minute the man had taken a round brass thing out from somewhere under the bonnet, and was pinching something on it between his finger and thumb.

He grunted: "It's a thousand to one you haven't got a spare." He said, "Make-and-break spring gone. It's the guts of the whole thing. Costs about a tanner, and no one ever thinks of carrying a spare."

"I don't know the answer to that one," said Ingle. "But I'm immensely obliged to you already. If you can tell me how to get fixed up. . . ."

"Oh, I'll fix you up myself," said the other. "I was going home for my dinner; but I don't mind being a bit late. I'll slip up to the Broadway on the next car, and be back in twenty minutes. If they haven't got a spring at Becketts', they'll let me make one."

"That's very good of you," said Ingle. "But why should you bother?"

Hales said: "The odds are Becketts' wouldn't be able to send a chap down till after one o'clock, and you probably couldn't fit it to the mag. yourself. It's tricky, if you don't know the trick."

"Well, I don't," Ingle admitted. "But I don't like keeping you—unless——"

"Oh, I'll accept payment all right," Hales said; "but I won't sting you. Two and three an hour is my proper pay, in a job, and that's what I'll charge you: with tuppence for tram-fares, and the price of the new spring. They may stick me for a bob or eighteenpence at Becketts'."

"Are you out of a job for the moment, then?" Ingle asked.

"Yes," said the other; "and a pretty long moment. Ever since the Picnic. I rushed like hell to get demobbed so as not to get left. But I was a bit pernicky. Because I'd been a staff-sergeant-fitter, one or two jobs I got put on to



weren't good enough for me. Well, I know different now. I'm getting where I'd work for nothing, rather than not have a job at all."

"I haven't had a job either," said Ingle, "since I was demobbed." He did not explain that his own period of unemployment had been a matter of weeks only, because of the eighteen months he had put in in India. He suppressed this fact only because of a vague inclination for kinship with his rescuer.

"But I haven't any capital either," said the rescuer.

"That must make a difference," Ingle admitted.

"It does," said the other. "Specially when you're standing up against a gold mine, the way we are now. I've only got to walk for twenty minutes from my house to come and look at it. And I *do* come and take a look at it, pretty well every day—and think——"

"Where's your gold mine?" asked Ingle; but the rumble of a tram three hundred yards away, coming towards them and moving eastwards, was already altering the tempo of their conversation.

"Behind us," said the other. He spoke hurriedly and almost in a whisper. "This muck-heap—from these railings to the railway embankment—and about a hundred yards along it." His last words as he began to cross the road to stop and catch the tram were, "A proper *gold* mine."

Ingle got into his car again. It was a quarter past twelve. He noticed the peculiarity of the enthusiasm that was keeping his rescuer from his dinner while his own stomach (which belonged to the class trained for refilling at one o'clock instead of twelve) was already beginning to be present within him.

Hales's first description of the immediate landscape as a gold mine was not supported by the evidence as obviously as was his second description—"muck-heap". Tyres, both of bicycles and cars, are frail enough during their years of service to man. But let man once abandon them and they become immediately indestructible. Neither as an individual nor as a corporate municipal body has man yet devised a means of removing them, at a stroke, from earth's fair surface—these, at any rate, were the lines along which Ingle reflected, as he looked at the gold mine with its tangle of docks and stinging-nettles, its one dead cat among



empty tins, a lump of coal or two that had tumbled down the railway embankment, and the tyres of Ingle's meditation.

In less than twenty minutes Hales was back. "Bit of luck," he said. "They had one. Ninepence. We'll just see."

Ingle expressed appropriate thanks, but said no more while Hales transferred the contact-breaker and its retaining screw from his waistcoat pocket to the magneto. Then he swung the engine. He stepped back and listened to the chatter and clatter that Ingle accepted as symptoms of adequacy and efficiency. Hales shook his head sadly and said, "There's just about nothing in the whole box of tricks that couldn't do with a touch up."

"I daresay," said Ingle, and switched off. "Now let's hear about the gold mine."

"*Capital*," said the other. "It's no good talking without capital."

"There I don't agree," said Ingle. "Talk is always good—so long as it sticks to facts—or even ideas about facts. It's only when it staggers into being ideas about other ideas that it's no good. Then it's criticism. Besides I've got capital and I've got my keep for nearly three years—and something to spare. If you've got a chart with a cross marked on it for hidden treasure—well—anyhow, there's no harm in looking at it, and talking."

"Did you notice the bridge behind you?" asked Hales.

Ingle admitted that his powers of observation had gone that far. The bridge is among the five ugliest little things in England; and they were in its shadow as they talked.

"The point is," said the other, "did you slow up?"

Ingle admitted that his sense of caution was commensurate with his powers of observation.

"There you are!" said Hales. "What more do you want? So does everyone else slow up. *This bridge is a death-trap*. And what's more, it *looks* it. It *looks* worse than it is, which most death-traps don't. You've got everything there to slow a car right down: a railway bridge over you, a bend in the road, tram lines, a slope in the road to get them shining wet and slippery if there's as much as a drop of rain anywhere; and three roads that shoot under the arch at all angles. If you've got sense you slow up, and crawl through on second gear. If you haven't got sense you chance it, brassing along—and ten times out of every thousand the chance doesn't come off. You either hit some-



thing coming out of one of the other corners, or you do yourself in against the wall, skidding to avoid it. I haven't spent part of most days in the last twelve months watching this place for nothing; and I know all about selling petrol. If you want to sell petrol you've got to slow a car up before it gets to you; or else it just sails on, till it *does* slow up—for a bite to eat, or a drink, or because the petrol itself has run out. A petrol station here, sir, would have half its business done for it by that nasty-looking bridge. It's just as nasty whichever way you look at it—going *or* coming. A petrol-station here would get ten cars for petrol out of every hundred that slow up; a garage and repair shop here would get at least one, as a wreck, out of every thousand that don't. And if I were to tell you how many cars I've counted going under that bridge in one afternoon *now*—against a year, or even six months ago—you wouldn't believe me."

"It sounds," said Ingle, but his sarcasm was friendly and not offensive, "like money for nothing."

"There's no money for nothing in the motor trade," said Hales solemnly. "But there's plenty of money for—*work*. If you're lucky enough to get in on it." He very delicately and subtly trilled the *r*'s in "motor trade" and "work", so that one knew him to have come, remotely, from the latitudes where steel is wrought and fashioned into engines.

Ingle said, "Look here, I've kept you from your dinner for a good hour or more. The dinner will be spoilt, so I owe you for that in addition to the time you've put in—at two and threepence an hour or part thereof, and the spring. Say six shillings to cover it? Can you meet me here at eleven o'clock day after to-morrow? I've got an appointment to keep now, and have to be away for a couple of nights."

Both these statements were untrue. All Ingle wanted was time in which to think whether setting up a petrol station, a garage and repair shop would fit in with the definitions of what he now believed to be sound principles of life.

"I'll be here," said the other; and it was now that he said, "My name is Hales."



## CHAPTER VII

THE principles of Life which Ingle had at last recognised as sound, resolved themselves into one single principle which he had begun to expound in dug-outs and rest-billets under varying conditions of rain and frost, bombardment and quiet; on various marches; in a railway journey across the Sind desert; and in the lee of rocks in Baluchistan. His discourse took, at first, the formless shape of anger at the prevalent uppishness of most human beings with regard to human destiny. It made him, in the common phrase, sick. He could find no words for it—till he found the word "Quo-vadism". It seemed to him then that it was this one besetting vice of "Quo-vadism" that distinguished the monotonous gang that moved about in studios and studies and brainy tea-fights from all other human beings who, in some mysterious way, live their lives instead of examining them.

Often enough he had been challenged to explain this distinction. When he attempted to explain it by saying that one was "doing" and the other "talking" he was pulled up by the monotonous comment—"well, if it's a matter of *talking*, dear old Nooks—well, I ask you——"

The simple fact was that he did not know what the difference was between the practice of Quo-vadism, which was loathsome, and the other thing which was not; between a sort of yapping and blinking and choking and sneezing in the dust raised by one's heels, instead of moving on briskly and lustily, so that one's backside could scarce be seen for it.

He did not know what the difference was: but it was precisely this that he intended, now that he was "free", to find out. Harold—he who had now assumed the job of explaining to Margery all the minute intricacies of her soul and of his own—Harold, prince of Quo-vadists and fathead without par, would greatly have enjoyed analysing this matter with him . . . and the analysis, per Harold and such as Harold, would have been as nearly emetic upon the stomach of Ingle as any affair of the spirit can be. . . .

The same pocket, which in the waistcoat of Harold would have yielded a fountain-pen and a small, narrow book of luncheon appointments, yielded in the waistcoat of the fellow who said his name was Hales and that a garbage



heap was a gold mine, a screwdriver. The ego buttoned up in the waistcoat with the fountain-pen could tell him nothing with volumes of talk, while perhaps the other, with nothing but the screwdriver, could tell him much.

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And so he returned to Hales two days later at the spot where he had left him. There was no more of the air of unemployment about Hales than there was about Ingle himself. Except that they were meeting across a roadside gutter by a garbage-dump, they might have been solicitor and client, doctor or dentist and patient—or any other two normally busy men brought together by the ability of one to meet the demands made by the other.

The facts were all simple enough. The strip of land was in want of a buyer: a buyer? A vocalist, rather; since three hundred pounds for the freehold of such a territory was a song if ever there was one. Hales was able to say that the prospect had been viewed, examined and rejected by adventurer after adventurer. The railway killed it dead for dwelling-houses; and the desolation killed it for shops. If ever a demand had been obvious, a whole series of demands was obvious now. The owners of the land were demanding a buyer: the land itself was demanding a petrol pump: the great petrol companies were demanding decent men (with respectable credit behind them) to accept pumps as virtual gifts; and Hales, if ever a man demanded anything, demanded work.

Life suddenly became for Ingle a simple and quite explicable process. It had nothing whatever to do with the one sort of bickering or another that makes up the relationships which keep homes together or shatter them, and constitute studio-parties. It was the fulfilment of demand—like the flow of oxygen into lungs, sheer and simple. Studio-chats and personal relationships on the level of them—marriage and similar chafferings—had about as much essential importance in the process of life itself as wheezing and sneezing are an essential part of the oxygen travelling to the urge of lungs. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

It was ten years after this revelation to Ingle that Hales answered the buzz on his desk by knocking on the door of the Governor's sitting-room.



Supply and demand still were life, a flow as smooth and easy as the interplay of lung and oxygen. The relationships of one human nervous system to another, man's distorted preoccupation with the question of whether he does, or does not, account himself personally happy—these were still, to Life, as wheezing and sneezing and snoring are to oxygen. . . .

"I've just been speaking to the Clinic," Ingle said, as Hales sat down in the chair indicated for him. "Your wife is very comfortable."

"Thank you, sir," said Hales. It did not surprise him. It was believed on all four floors of the Garage that the staff was the Governor's family; and that he knew more about them than some of them knew about themselves. But Hales was a mechanic, and was interested in the process by which the Governor had got his information. "How did you know about this Clinic, sir? Did you ring the hospital first?"

"No," said Ingle. "Dr. Thompson rang me—and mentioned it."

He was looking at his foreman, trying to judge whether Thompson had been talking fair sense or trying to dramatise the affair with his phrases of "complete nervous exhaustion", "end of his tether, poor chap", "must get a rest soon or he'll blow up . . . By a rest I mean a *real* rest . . . Get him right away with nothing to do, and nothing to think about. . . ."

"Hales," Ingle said, deciding that the doctor might be right, "I was going up to Coventry on Monday; but I think you had better go instead. Those chaps still spot me as an amateur and ask me a lot of questions that I can't answer. The job in hand is to place that American fan-pulley, of which we've bought the rights. It's a big job. I know selling is not your line, but I don't see why it shouldn't be, this time; because all the talk required is engineers' and mechanics' talk. Whenever I try to say things like 'a couple of thou.', and 'out of true' and that sort of thing, it sounds like showing off. When you say them it's the real thing; and that goes a long way in selling to Scotchmen. Mind, it's a big job; a colossal job—you know what I paid for the option. Would you like to tackle it for us? If you can get them down to brass tacks—price, and the actual contract—I'll take it on. You can send me



a wire, or ring up. What I want you to do is demonstrate the thing—show them the one we've had on test, and explain the production of it."

"Very good, sir," said Hales. And then, after a pause, "I could go easily Monday evening."

"Evening?" said Ingle.

"Monday afternoon then," Hales conceded.

Ingle said, "H'm . . . why not to-morrow?" He agreed so thoroughly with Dr. Thompson now, that even two days seemed a long delay in starting a man on a strenuous job when he was already at the end of his tether.

"To-morrow," said Hales thoughtfully and most reasonably, "will be Saturday."

Faced with so true a statement Ingle thought that he himself might as well admit the truth that was in his mind. "A night and a Sunday's loafing in Coventry wouldn't do you any harm."

A striking thing about Hales had always been his complete apathy with regard to time or place. It was, indeed, from him that Ingle had learned to see that a night-shift of work differs from a day-shift with regard to illumination only, and in no other respect whatever. Working under a car by night, a man is forced to handle a movable electric bulb and to adjust an eyeshade or the peak of a cap: by day he might not have to do these things. That is all the difference; but between one day and another, or one night or one week and another, there never had been any difference at all. He now said morosely, "I could loaf here just as well, and go Monday."

Ingle was puzzled.

"You know," he said, "there isn't a thing in the world you can do for your wife by hanging about here. I'll do all the ringing up to find out how she is. And I'd keep you posted."

"It isn't that," said Hales. "I—well—there's a special job on downstairs. It'll be finished Monday."

"Oh," said Ingle, "which job is that?" It was part of the routine that the day-typist and the night-typist in the job-office sent up a copy of every job-sheet for him to see at his leisure, and dissect for the chart he was making to indicate the relative weaknesses in different parts of different makes of cars.

"You won't have seen the sheet for it yet," said Hales,



remembering that for the first time in his career as a foreman of the "Never-Sleep" he had omitted to dictate a job-sheet and obtain the customer's signature thereon before running the car into the workshop. "I don't quite know yet what's to be done."

Ingle said, "Oh! But surely you know what the customer authorised you to do? And surely you haven't forgotten the almighty row that made me start our system of signed job-sheets?"

"I know," said Hales. "I'm sorry. He was in a hurry. But there won't be any trouble with him. He's all right."

"You're making a hell of a mystery of it," said Ingle, and this was the one idea that Hales had wanted to keep out of his head.

"No mystery at all, sir," said he, "except my forgetting to do the job-sheet. It's just de-coking, brake-linings, and tune up by Monday morning."

"A customer I know?" Ingle asked; and Hales answered, very casually, "No, sir."

As soon as he had said it, he saw that his secretiveness was an absurdity; for Kempthorne himself had advertised his presence to Dr. Thompson.

The truth of the matter was the strain that had existed, through a superficially peaceable ten years, between Hales and the day foreman, Winter.

Winter spoke unstintingly well of only one human being in all the world, and that human being was the one whom everyone else in the Garage referred to as "his nibs", in the particular tone that conveys no high opinion: he who drove a car as though he were trundling a wheelbarrow; whose wife Hales had taught to snick from one gear to another at any speed without the faintest murmur; she who had left her car exposed in the yard of the "Silver Horse-shoe" at the moment when Kempthorne arrived there with his suitcase.

That, in fine, was all that bothered Hales; that, with the twinkle of recognition within him of some natural and immense kinship that could exist between the spirit of Kempthorne and of her who drove the Quail. With these reasons for uneasiness went the fact that Winter would be the one to see the job through for handing over to Kempthorne on Monday morning, if Hales should be in Coventry, or in bed.



"I'd just like to stay and see the job through, sir," he said, "ready for handing over on Monday morning."

"As you very well know," said Ingle, "most things are pretty much the same to me, as long as I can explain them to myself. But when I see a fellow like you, for the first time in his life, sulking and raising silly objections to something quite simple, I'm naturally annoyed; because I'm puzzled. I know you've had a ghastly time of anxiety and strain and though I don't know about it, there may be something keeping you——"

"No, sir, there isn't," said Hales. He saw that it was idiotic to bother any more about Kempthorne and the chance that he had arrived at the "Silver Horseshoe" when a particular two-seater was parked in the yard. "I'll go tomorrow, as you say."

"Oh no, you won't," said Ingle. "You'll wait till Monday evening. Whatever was serious enough to set you going the way you started, is serious enough to count. I don't care what it is; you needn't tell me."

Hales felt such a fool, as he had seldom felt before. "I'd tell you——" he began, and could get not a syllable further.

Ingle smiled. He said, "The same sort of thing happens to people who paint pictures. They get a sort of smudge, or blur, in their minds and they can't put it into words—or even on to paper or canvas. Never mind! If you're having more trouble with Mr. Harrison, I'll see about it on Monday. You can come up on Sunday night for me to tell you all about this Coventry job——"

"No, sir," said Hales, "there isn't any trouble with Mr. Harrison. Not since we took in that Alvis." Then he saw that this was an opportunity for diversion for his own thoughts and their rather annoying preoccupation with the destinies of Kempthorne and the Quail. "At least," he said, "nothing more than the usual."

Ingle again smiled. "Salesmen are poets, Hales," he said. "Beauty is truth to them. Truty is booth; bruth, teauty . . . And not only is that all they need to know—it's all they are damned well capable of knowing. It's the materialists like you and me—the brass-tack-gents—that have got to do all the dirty work of prices. But there's a touch of poetry in that, too, don't you think?"

The mind of Hales was quite bare on the point. But the



Governor's double-Dutch was often more enlivening than another man's plain-English.

He smiled and said good-night, and went down again to his lair; and from his lair into the workshop.

The engine of Kempthorne's car was already in a state of dissection advanced sufficiently for him to meditate thereon. But he did not spend long in meditation. A scratch with his thumbnail gave him the temper of the carbon deposit, to show that the simple care a man may give to his machine—of decent fuel, and of oil in plenty—had been given to this one by Kempthorne. That faint knock would be the result of mischance and not mishandling; so he passed on down the shop, to fill in the time looking at other jobs till Kempthorne's valves should be cleanly exposed for him.

There was always at least one job in the place to represent the contention that lay between himself and Harrison—the contention that lies, and will for ever lie—between the salesman and the shop-foreman. It is the same enmity that binds him who buys to him who sells; him who is done to him who does.

For the salesman is to the shop-foreman as East is to West. They have never met. Even their languages are distinct. Just as to the mechanic a salesman's driving of a car is a brutality beyond the uttermost scorn, so to the salesman the very talk of the workshop is a jargon of uncouth savages, understood but dimly. The mechanic speaks of cars by no class-names or symbolic epithets. The impression, current among the laity, that a car is generally referred to among the Craft as a bus, is as grotesque an inaccuracy as it would be to think of an infantryman calling his rifle a gun or an artilleryman calling his gun a cannon. Those who do speak of cars, loosely, as "buses" are only the boys on the petrol pump, and owners of these cars when talking down to mechanics in what they believe to be their proper slang. To the mechanic in any walk of his profession but the very lowest, a car is never anything but the individual that it is, referred to and known exactly and precisely by its proper name. It is "the Austin", "the Rolls", "the Ford", "the Bentley", "the Stutz", "the Hornet", or whatever else it may be. He would as soon—with as little reason—refer to anyone of these individuals as just a car as the section-commander in a battery of artillery



would address the familiar Smith, lead-driver of one of his gun-teams, as "soldier".

-To get as deliberately and, it would seem, as remotely far from the mechanic even in this one detail, the man who deals *in* cars, instead of *with* them will refer to any and every individual among them as a "motor-car". It is a curious fact: but there it is. Only those who seldom think upon this thing which is now a common piece of civilised man's furniture—shy old ladies, and gaffers in remote villages—share with those whose incessant speech concerning it is their daily bread, the one word "Motor-Car". You would expect them, of all men, to have found some abbreviation, some crisp symbol for this one thing that dominates their lives and the thought of their every waking hour; but it is they who survive alone in thought, with those who have survived a past generation in the mystery that keeps body and soul together, to call a car not just friendlyly "a car"—not intimately and knowingly and accurately "the Singer", "the Austin", "the Ford" or "the Alvis": not even vulgarly "a bus", but pompously, archaically and for ever, a "Motor-Car". They, it seems, are not satisfied with any words from the speech of other men. "Fast" is a good enough word in the minds and mouths of most men when they think and speak of that which is not slow. But the Motor-Car Salesman who could speak of a fast mechanically propelled vehicle with an internal combustion engine as anything but a "rapid motor-car" has not yet been born.

Such is the gulf, then, between the true Salesman and the true Mechanic. The latter, to convey an estimate of speed, would use not a word at all, but a figure. His eye would glance at lines of body-work, at wheels and suspension, at the rake of windscreen and at evidence, perhaps, of mud-splashes; he would shrug his shoulders and the guess he would hazard would be no adjective, but simply "sixty-five", or "seventy" or, in the higher reaches, "eighty".

Differences in speech are differences in thought. The motor-car's movements for the salesman are movements of figures in the salesman's mind. For him, the motor-car does no journeys upon a road; it does sums in a book. The salesman, moreover, uses not the ordinary figures of school-taught arithmetic, he has symbols of his own. The



digit 'five' for example, means not five to him. It means either fifty or five hundred according to the context of the deal. Similarly three-and-a-half or four-and-a-half mean thirty-five or three hundred and fifty, forty-five or four hundred and fifty. (To his regret it is seldom that the digits between two and nine symbolise hundreds, and not tens.)

A "Motor-Car ex-works" catalogued at any price is a specification to the mind of the mechanic, and a picture to the mind of the buyer. To the salesman it is, purely and simply, a "margin"; but a margin not clean and wide and unblemished as margins should be—and as, in most other trades, margins usually are.

Upon the "margin" represented by the list-price of the new Motor-Car is scrawled the ancient, but always various, problem of the "old model" to be taken in part exchange. (It is curious that while the car he is selling is invariably, for the salesman, a "Motor-Car", the car which the present laws of nature inflict upon him in part exchange is a "Model".) It is "the Model" which was always the meeting ground of Mr. Harrison with Hales.

The name and the year of the Model were a figure in the mind of Mr. Harrison, amended month by month, and easily verified by the Trade booklet in his waistcoat-pocket. Then, when the eye of Mr. Harrison had appraised the model and the tongue of him had duly belittled paint-work, wings, upholstery, tyres and engine compression to the owner, his mind worked with the wide sweep normal to the mind of any visionary. Suppose, having looked at the model and spoken ill of her to the owner, he had decided that they could let her "come in at three-and-a-half", this meant thirty-five pounds, no shillings and no pence on the hire-purchase agreement as deposit on the motor-car he was selling. The next action of Mr. Harrison's mind was concerned with the margin, and with keeping that margin clean—as clean as was humanly possible. To himself he could shrug away the immense cloud of smoke that his wild and sudden revving of the engine flung from the exhaust of the old model—after he had frowned and wagged his head for the benefit of the customer. His thought would be "a new piston-ring or two . . . nothing . . . shillings". In its dealings with other items of renovation his mind's working was an equally large and sweeping gesture. Paint?—a lick



with a brush would do it. Instead of the boys loafing empty-handed in the paint-shop, they would loaf with a paint-brush for half an hour. (He still thought of paint as being applied with a brush.)

Brakes demanded one thing and one thing only in the mind of Mr. Harrison—"taking up". Any knock under the bonnet meant, largely, "adjustment". And so the blemish on the margin which represented the "motor-car" about to be sold—the cost, in short, of transforming "the model" from "a model" into another "motor-car"—was kept as small as a five-pound note. If the tyres were worn to the fabric smooth as an egg, he could dismiss this outlay as "a set of new shoes", with the thought that thus was the tyre-stock of the garage most happily turned over, and old stuff got out of the way before it perished.

It was thus that contention arose between Mr. Harrison and Hales—for it was generally during the shifts commanded by Hales that reconditioning jobs were done. Hales had gained considerable ground against his adversary during their years of association; but his adversary, mysteriously, did not appear to have lost any. In the earliest days the routine had been for Mr. Harrison to "take in a model" at a certain figure, and to scribble a certain other figure on a slip of paper over his initials and to jab this piece of paper over a convenient projection of some instrument on the dash. This paltry figure—usually no more than a single figure to indicate the pounds, with shillings added for mere effrontery—represented the amount he estimated and authorised to cover the cost of making the model into a motor-car. The details of the process were left to Hales. Usually Hales could have spent the whole sum (in material, power-costs and his men's time) on the paint-work alone, without so much as lifting the bonnet of the old car; or he could have spent it under the bonnet without touching the paint. Those were the days when the Governor still had time in which to carry about the scales of justice and to weigh matters that arose between one employee and another. When Mr. Harrison had convinced him in the afternoon that an expenditure of any more than five pounds on the model "coming in at three-and-a-half" would rob the transaction of its last shred of poetry, Hales would convince him at night that five pounds would not cover the cost of adjustments alone—carried out in adhesive-tape,



gold-size and washers; and all the tittivations, so essential in a "motor-car", though negligible in a "model", were still unprovided for. Some years of this state of affairs produced a development in the routine. It was ruled by the Governor that the salesman should write not only a figure on the paper introducing the model to the workshop, but that he must split the figure under two headings—one of them being his estimate for tittivation and the other for work which was connected, in his poetic mind, with the guts of the machine. In due course a crisis arose, wherein Mr. Harrison challenged the honesty and competence of Hales and all his crew. If, he said, Hales could not perform the trifling work to be done on a particular model at a cost to the Firm of less than a five-pound note, he knew of someone "outside" who could. He drove the model away in dudgeon to a ramshackle garage and repair shop somewhere in the slums of Shepherd's Bush. The sum, whether small or large, that he contributed from his privy purse so as to keep the Firm's expenditure within the specified limits, was never known. Hales had occasion to drive the machine one day (taking it from the back of the new and growing showroom). On his return he adjusted the tappets and the timing of the magneto with his own hands, gratis. The brake drums he had skimmed out to true, at a charge of five shillings to the Sales Department.

Routine was adapted still further to the needs of the commerce between the departments of Mr. Harrison and the department of Hales—the department of Poetry, as the Governor called it, and the department of Drama. So there was no nonsense now. When Mr. Harrison took in a model and dumped it in the workshop there was no casual piece of paper stuck on the dash or the steering-wheel; no loosely conceived figures. There were, in fact, no figures at all. The official introduction was a proper job-sheet, dictated by Mr. Harrison to the works-department typist. At points in his dictation where the correct word eluded or evaded him, this girl was usually able to supply it. The sheet, authorising specific jobs, was signed by Mr. Harrison on behalf of the Sales Department, as though he were an ordinary customer.

The only drawback to this system was that he behaved like a customer—and not like an ordinary customer either, but like the Garage's half-dozen troublesome ones. He



queried every charge, examined paint-work, and found new stains and scratches on upholstery.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE question of Mr. Harrison and his high doings was, then, a big enough matter to have given Hales a pretext of being engaged to the point of not being able to rush off, without notice, to Coventry or elsewhere.

Since the Governor had put the thought in his head he went straight to the two jobs presented by the Sales Department in the last week. One was a big affair, an old car with a standing in the market sufficient to warrant Harrison's taking, her in at a figure where "one" represented not ten pounds, but a hundred, and three-quarters represented seventy-five. In his reconditioning details for this job Harrison had shown his imagination to be capable of straightening out a kink in a chassis-member with black paint. But in the sister-job to this one—a three-year-old model "coming in at four-and-a-half" in the class where four-and-a-half meant forty-five—he had magnificently thought to include the cost of a new radiator on account of leaks that required only the intelligent use of a soldering-iron for half an hour. The over-estimate on the small job would thus go towards squaring the under-estimate on the big one; and Hales was soon engaged in devising contributions from economies on other parts of the large job herself towards the cost of the chassis straightening. When the Sales Department was wrong (as it invariably and inevitably was wrong) it had become incumbent on Hales to make even the Sales Department right.

At first this Garage had been for him a small bench with an enormous vice at the end of it; a portable forge and a hand-drill picked up at a sale of Army Surplus stores. In time a lathe was added; the bench was lengthened and manned, at its lower end, by an assistant. The Garage became for Hales not a bench with a few accessories and, vaguely but essentially, the Governor, but a whole and fully-equipped workshop, wherein Hales had a dozen pairs of adept hands to execute the bidding of his brain. In time it became more than the whole workshop with the dozen pairs of hands. It was now the machine which was the



whole Garage, including the Sales Department and Mr. Harrison. Therefore, when Mr. Harrison erred, since err he always must—having fingers that were thumbs and hands that were ham—the onus was upon Hales to manage, somehow, to put the matter right; to maintain a smoothness in the machine's complete running by working so upon a job that the invoice against the Sales Department agreed, as nearly as was humanly possible, with the Sales Department's estimate. It was a fact that he never cooked these invoices; and this was due not to any sense of morals, but to a sense of mechanics and construction; his knowledge that unless details were sound and true, the whole would be anyhow.

Thus there was some discipline now upon Mr. Harrison. He remained a poet; but the dictation of a detailed job-sheet—even if his details were like the talk of customers—deprived him of free-verse and inflicted upon him something of the austerity of metre.

Hales and Mr. Harrison thus worked together, and their working was an integral part of the ultimate rhythm that was the "Never-Sleep". The rhythm was like the great Neon sign on its framework of slender steel above the smooth face of the building. The tremor and vibration within it—the shaking and throb of every atom like Hales and Mr. Harrison—were movements only in their relation to one another. From without you saw neither shake nor throb; all you saw was the singleness of light conjured out of darkness and riveted against the blackness of the sky; a bright, steady unity grown up from footings first imagined and then accurately scrawled in a muck-heap—the steadiness and the singleness of the whole depending on the minute scintillation of every atom, and on its "timing" in relation to every other.

And so they were now "timed", Hales and Mr. Harrison. Models "came in" at symbolic and cryptic figures, and Motor-Cars were sold. These transactions took place by day. The metamorphosis of the "Model" into "Motor-Car" was a mystery of the night. The lord of the transactions was Mr. Harrison; the lord of the mystery was Hales. Working thus in the closest touch, either of them could nowadays have grown an adequate beard without the other's being aware of it; for each of them was gone from the Garage before the other had normally come.



## CHAPTER IX

AMONG the many movements of Hales that were as automatic as his breathing, was his switching of the telephone to the workshop whenever he went there from his cubicle.

He had been in the shop about an hour when Curly signalled to him and said: "The Governor wants you." He stopped his lathe as Hales leaned his elbows on the bench and took the receiver.

"You, Hales?" the Governor said; "I ought to have remembered while you were up here. It's about a Quail a man thinks he wants to buy. We might not be able to get one down from Town before Monday or Tuesday for a trial run—and someone else might get the order. He's that sort of customer. All in a hurry. I thought of Mrs. Hudson. I'd have rung her up myself if I had got back earlier. Not that she would allow *me* to drive it for two yards. But I think she wouldn't mind your asking if you might take it out for half an hour, just to show it off to our customer. He will be free any time to-morrow. Do you think you could ring her up first thing in the morning—before I'm up—and ask her?"

Hales said: "Yes, sir."

"Not *too* early," Ingle continued. "Be reasonable about it—though I don't really know any better than you do, after these few years of keeping our own peculiar hours, what is a correct hour for asking a lady for the loan of her car. Not before eight, I should say; though not much after. It's Saturday, don't forget, and they may disappear for the day."

Hales could have said that Mr. Hudson was away from home, since his car had been brought back to the Garage after taking Mr. Hudson and a little luggage to a train; and that he believed the Quail was not available. He was sure enough now, in his mind, that it was many miles away. But he said: "Very good, sir."

Immediately he began to think.

One thought that passed, almost irrelevantly, through his mind, was the question whether Kempthorne could be described, by anyone, as a "darling old bachelor uncle"; as one, moreover, who could have lived in any state of permanency at Bournemouth.



He thought, on the whole, not.

But the question that took possession of him completely was how or where to get hold of a Quail through channels even more unusual than the one suggested by the Governor.

There were, obviously, "the Trade", and more especially "the Street". (Among garages of the "Never-Sleep" type there is an abbreviation even more contemptuous than "the Street". It is "G.P.") But at the bare thought of those base alternatives Hales curled away in thought. No, thank you. . . . A certain kind of handling could make a tin-can of even a Quail in ten thousand miles; but Hales wanted a Quail that was still a Quail. Like Mrs. Hudson's.

The question of whether she was, or was not, gone away with Kempthorne became a question again.

It would be worth it, almost, to ring up in a few hours' time, as the Governor had suggested, just because of the barest possibility of speaking to her. And, undoubtedly, if he had thought that the possibility did really exist, he would have rung up. But the possibility did not exist; and he did not want anyone—even himself—to start messing about in other people's business. For the rest he dug in his mind for recollections of one crony or another from the past who might be able to lay his hand on a roadworthy Quail. But it is not easy for men like Hales to pick up old friendships just when they want them for some special purpose. Of the scores of men he had known at different times as fellow-craftsmen, though all of them were still probably engaged in driving engines of one sort or another or keeping them in order, and though most of them were probably somewhere in London, he could not think of a single one who could be materialised with a possible Quail, by telephone.

Human beings were therefore a link quite negligible between him and cars. Also, by reason of his years of night-work, cars were only on very rare occasions a link between him and their owners. Generally they were an end in themselves.

At about six o'clock he went back into the workshop to Charlie. "You took down a Quail some time back," he said. "A valve wasn't seating."

Charlie remembered. "Gent in Hanwell," he said. "I had to deliver the job before eight for him to be off to the South. Travels biscuits for a firm in Reading. There



was a case of samples in the car, all poshed up with little packets in that glassy paper."

"Oh," said Hales. "He may have come in since for other jobs during the day. You don't remember the name, so that I could look it up?"

"No," said Charlie. "I know the house, though. They'd know the name in the office as soon as Mr. Winter comes. He'd know it. It was he who left word for it to be taken round first thing in the morning."

Nice thing, to set Winter nosing about! thought Hales. . . .

He said: "Every traveller living within ten miles of this place ought to be a regular customer on our books, instead of a casual. That's just what we work nights for—to service cars that have got to work in the day, and every day."

"I tried that on him when I took the job over," said Charlie. "Told him we could always collect, any night at any time, for any job that wants doing; and deliver by eight."

"That's the stuff, boy," said Hales. "D'you think you've got him for the Governor?"

"Not quite," said Charlie. "He said he's only at home from Friday nights till Monday morning; on the road all week in the South. You wouldn't think a chap could make a living out of selling biscuits, would you? And if his firm pays for his car and hotel bills through the week, you wouldn't think it would pay the firm. After all, a hundred quids' worth of fancy biscuits would go a hell of a long way; and that wouldn't mean more than five quid to the bloke selling them. It beats *me*."

"He ought to be a customer, all the same," said Hales. "Even if he's away most nights we could have the car week-ends. If you're sure he's here at week-ends."

"Oh yes," said Charlie. "He's O.K. for week-ends—but he needs it for golf Saturdays and Sundays. He told me that when I spun the usual yarn the Governor's told us about 'Service after Service'—'our foreman always wanting to test out a job a few days after it's been done.' I asked him if he could run her in here for a few minutes the following Saturday or Sunday."

"Well," said Hales. "We'll toddle up at eight, and you can show me the house. We'll bring it back ourselves."



This, thought Charlie, was carrying things a little far. He agreed absolutely, in principle, with the Governor's idea of making regular customers of casuals, and he saw that "Service after Service" was a good-sounding gag. It was all right when it was wanted; but it was not the kind of thing that usually required pushing on customers. If customers wanted a thing which they could get for nothing they usually, in the experience of Charlie, asked for it.

"And what about his golf?" asked Charlie.

"We'll lend him the little Standard to take him to his golf," said Hales, "unless he's the sort that needs six *lessons*, as they call them, before taking out a strange car."

"He'll be all right with the Standard," said Charlie. "There's no flies on him."

For the next few minutes Charlie meditated upon the mystery and the scope of eye-wash. "Service after Service" was eye-wash for the benefit of customers; and, customers being generally gullible, it was all to the good. But this last scheme of Hales's he suspected of being a dodge to impress no person other than himself, Charlie, with the conscientiousness of which the Governor made such a point. He remembered the fuss Hales had once made on finding that he had made good a screw in the door-jamb of a small saloon (after drilling too large a hole for it) by biting a match in two and filling the hole therewith. He had ventured, on that occasion, to point out to Hales that a Rawl-plug is the same principle as a match-stick chewed up and stuffed into a hole; and that the Rawl-plug patent is worth a fortune. . . . As an immediate result of that argument, however, he had never argued with Hales again; so now he said: "Okay, Chief. I'll get the Standard out, ready, in the morning."

The Quail owner was glad enough of any opportunity or pretext for driving a strange car. It was not that he did not appreciate the value and the unapproachable virtues of his own possession. He did, fully; as he appreciated his wife. But he was by nature sociable. His only question to Hales was whether he had brought petrol enough in the Standard for his day's needs.

It was a great comfort to Hales that Charlie would be away from the Garage for sixteen hours; for during that time the whole Quail business would be done and finished with.



Winter was the only nuisance; and the reason, very largely, was the etiquette which was observed by the two in their dealings with each other.

Hales went back to the Garage and ran the borrowed Quail into the workshop and went to Winter in the cubicle. He said: "I'll initial the card for that job you done for Mr. Humphreys some weeks ago. It's O.K. Remember' it? Two-seater Quail." In saying even as little as this to Winter, he felt that he was saying a lot.

"Yes. I remember," said Winter. "The only Quail we've seen here inside a twelvemonth, bar our Mrs. Hudson's."

"Bit of luck getting her in this morning," Hales went on, trying to be very casual; "the Governor just happens to want a Quail for a demonstration. Customer of Mr. Harrison's won't so much as look at anything else."

"Well," said Winter; "I daresay they thought you could borrow her ladyship's."

Hales thought: ". . . *our* Mrs. Hudson," "her ladyship. . . ." Winter never said anything without *meaning* something.

"No need to bother, then," Hales said. "She's in nice condition, this one. I'll get her greased up, for a couple of squeaks; and the engine washed down for this customer to look at. And he can be told this is a Commercial Traveller's car, doing six hundred miles week in, week out—and if that doesn't satisfy him—anyhow, I thought it would carry a bit more weight than a lady's car."

"Just as well you did," said Winter. "Fat chance we'd have had of borrowing Mrs. Hudson's Quail on a Saturday from what *I* know of the lady—with him gone North."

"Oh?" said Hales, and would have left it at that.

"Yes," said Winter. "Though I must say it's only during night-shifts that she ever leaves her car in. Still, you can't help noticing the mileage now and again, and the wear on the tyres—when Mr. Hudson has mentioned once or twice to me that it's only used for Mrs. Hudson's shopping."

"Oh," said Hales; "he has, has he?"

"He's just passed the remark. *But—*" and here Winter assumed the expression with which he beheld the world as a spectacle of disillusion to the man of ideals; "—but—if he doesn't know that he's bitten off a little more than he can chew or swallow— Anyhow, you must



toddle along now and turn in, old son. They tell me you had a rough evening of it; all the worry of getting the wife into hospital, and the operation, and one thing and another. If there's anything I can do for you, just say the word."

It was friendly enough; but there was absolutely nothing, even in the most general sense, that Winter could ever do for Hales.

He thanked him, and said that everything had been done, and that there was his sister-in-law at home.

"You shove off then." Winter was still friendly; for it was only what he sometimes called "the Way of the *World*" that caused him to snarl. "You shove off. I expect Mr. Harrison will be here to give this gent his run in the Quail, since I look like being busy."

Hales was always chary of treading on Winter's toes by any intrusion of himself into Winter's twelve hours of supremacy. So he was glad of the opening offered to him.

"If you're going to be busy," he said. "I'd better stay on for a bit and run her out myself. You know what Mr. Harrison is. Guaranteed to get a knock and a rattle and a pink out of a next year's Rolls."

"You don't want to hang about all day," said Winter considerately; "unless this customer is one of your specials, like Mrs. Hudson, I'll find time to take him out."

"I don't know him from Adam," said Hales. "He's one of the Governor's. But it won't be all day. I've got his phone number, and the Governor says he can come any time."

"So the Governor put you on to this one?" It was Winter all over; questions, questions. . . .

"This was young Charlie's idea," said Hales. "The Governor thought we might try Mrs. Hudson."

Winter hummed: "They don't know Nellie—like I do . . . said the naughty little . . ." then he pulled up. "By the way, you might give me the sheet for the job that came in last night. The Silex Sports——"

"I know," said Hales. "Been having a look at her?"

"They haven't got the sheet out there, and I haven't looked up the carbon in the office."

"There's no hurry," said Hales. "I told Hargreaves about the job when I took it in, and Curly. And young Charlie handed it over properly before he knocked off this



morning. The job will be all right."

"Oh, the *job* will be right enough," said Winter. "I'm not worrying about the job. You can trust them with a thing like a Silex. But you know what a song there is in this place over sheets. You'd wonder how garages were ever run at all before these famous job-sheets were invented. Where is that blasted sheet?"

"It won't be needed before Monday," said Hales.

"I'd say that it won't be needed before Doomsday," said the other. "They never are. But I'd like to know where it's got to. Still—I expect you had plenty to worry about last night, without chasing around after one of the Governor's pet bits of paper."

Enough to worry about. . . . Retreat after hasty retreat from glimpses of a face wan and impotent and weary beyond anything but a habit of pain; from the echo of moans. . . . A glimpse of the Quail's stern with the familiar little dent above the number-plate; then the hours of meditation upon the Quail and upon her who drove it—and the growing, out of absolutely nothing, of the sense of something sinister and threatening that loomed about her. . . . Yes, it was enough to worry about—and it was no more than the possibility of a shadow upon that which ought to have been, at all times, sunshine. It was a threat of some vague and dirty ugliness upon innocence; for the gaiety and grace of her who drove the Quail was innocence and all loveliness.

Possibly, if it had not been in the same breath that Winter had mentioned the Quail and the job-sheet for Basil Kempthorne's car (or if the breath had not been Winter's), Hales would have accepted the reminder quite openly, and said: "I'll go and dictate that blasted job-sheet now. I forgot it last night."

But he said nothing of the sort. Instead, he mumbled: "The Governor may have it himself. I was up with him for a bit just after the job came in."

He had an opportunity during the next hour of dictating a sheet to the works-typist. But it was difficult, because of the way in which Winter seemed to be following him about, as though to prevent his hands and his mind from performing the simplest of movements, or enjoying the idleness of being off duty and still hanging about.

The fact was that Hales was striking Winter forcibly

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and most impressively as a "Very Good Example". There he was; a straight, sober, honest, hard-working chap with not a thought in the world beyond his work and his duty to the Governor. A chap, moreover, who had never, so far as anyone knew, been any different. Looking at him, now that he was fifty, it was unthinkable that even in the days of his apprenticeship, he had ever used a file on a bearing or applied the naked steel of a hammer to a surface that demanded the gentler persuasion of wood. Never, one would guess, had he tried to suggest that fifty minutes in a workshop were, in fact, an hour. . . . And where had it got him? Where did such nobility and such devotion get any man? Five pounds ten a week for his work; and for the blamelessness of his life—torture. For Winter, in his contemplation of merits and rewards, did have the compassion to see that the illness of Mrs. Hales was a cruelty to Hales. So there it was; five pounds ten a week and torture, for competence that was absolute and devotion that was complete. While the Governor. . . . And in considering the Governor Winter attached no blame, for he liked the Governor and found no personal fault in him. He did not dislike him for raking off twenty or thirty or a hundred pounds a week against Hales's earning of five pounds ten and his own five pounds two shillings and sixpence; for the Governor, it seemed to him, was one of those unusual individuals who could even have dotted you one over the head with a spanner without exciting your anger. Winter thus no more hated the Governor than he loved Hales. What he did hate was "the System", and what he loved was contemplation of that hatefulness. And he waited upon the taciturn nerviness of Hales, observing the slightly bloodshot eyes, the jowls with the flaccidity normal to years of night-work made more flaccid still by months of weariness and strain.

"I'll take that Quail out for Mr. Harrison," he said. "He might have to wait a minute or two till I'm ready if I happen to be busy, or anything else. But *that* won't do him any harm. You pop off home."

"She can do with a grease up and a skim of oil over the springs," said Hales. "There's just that couple of squeaks that's got no business there." He moved towards the "shop" door; but Winter lounged into interception. "Rightio," he said. "I'll see to it. Don't worry."



Hales, the "Very Good Example" of the dirtiness of all human destiny, seemed to writhe in the trammels of that destiny, as he turned from the "shop" door towards his desk in their cubicle. There was a carton in it, containing twenty-five packets of cigarettes, and Hales disliked having to run out of the house for anything when once he had got home.

"If there's anything in there that wants looking to," said Winter, "all you've got to do is hand it over—or leave it till Monday."

Hales grunted, and took out his packet of cigarettes to take home.

This scheme of buying cigarettes in five hundred lots was Winter's own; for the retail tobacco trade was, to his mind, "A Case in Point". He saw no reason for fattening the middle-man, so he had taken out a tobacconist's licence on which he bought tobacco and sold it to the entire staff at wholesale prices with no profit to himself, beyond the satisfaction of doing regular tobacconists in the eye.

His silent comment on the grunt of exasperation from Hales was that preoccupation with his work was breaking him; but no—it was not this particular garage that was breaking the individual, Hales. It was the larger, the deeper, the utterly poisonous fact that struck him—the System; and Hales was the "Very Good Example".

Winter's approach to loving his colleague who had the bloodshot eyes and flaccid jowls was his gloomy hate of life. He would, therefore, make things hum in the workshop; chase the pestilential boys all day at their washing and greasing; get the benches as clear of left-overs as might be for the night-shift, so that Hales might find an unburdened shop—or rather, so that the System might find itself cheated, if only for an instant, of a victim. And in the meantime he could bustle the fellow off home.

A mechanic came out of the workshop and shouted back from the door. "It's all right, 'e's still here," and Winter swung round towards him. "Here?" he shouted. "Who's still where? If you want anything you know where to come for it, don't you, without worrying the night staff? I'll be out in a minute."

This, thought Hales, might be one of his occasional outbursts in defence of his prestige as lord of the workshop



by day; but he did not care. It would get the fellow away from his elbow for a few minutes.

It did. He went off, remarking that there were some people who would never learn certain things if you told them a hundred times, a thousand times, or *ten* thousand times. Not if you told them every bloody day. . . .

It was then that Hales went to the works-typist and dictated a job-sheet for Kempthorne's car. Winter was out of the workshop again when this was done, and out of the way, for he was explaining to one of the petrol-boys that cotton-waste was supplied to him for one purpose, and the white cover of his cap for quite another.

Hales joined him and said: "That sheet is O.K. You'll find it, if you want it, in the pocket of the job."

And Winter said: "Ta."

## CHAPTER X

THERE was that Scottish strain in Hales—the strain that is responsive to steel as the material, *par excellence*, for all the works of man, and to whisky as nature's way for remedying his every physical ill. The same Scotsman who believes that the refusal of half a pint of boiling whisky at the beginning of a cold or a colic is suicide and sin, will shrink in horror and contempt from a tablet of aspirin. The word "drug" and the whole idea behind it have some significance that is ignoble to the point of dirtiness. It is as though the more palpably mechanical nature of the affair would justify an engineer in giving a helping hand to his stomach or the tissues behind his nose; at any rate, the fact remains that Hales would have most heartily prescribed and concocted a punch for an innocent daughter, potent enough to absent a guardsman and his horse from parade; but would no more have thought of taking a DRUG than of taking a file to a bearing, or of living on the income of a woman.

He therefore absolutely annulled the suggestion of Dr. Thompson that he should call for a sleeping-draught, and went, from Winter, straight home.

He ate the meal which his sister had prepared for him—breakfast or supper, according to whether a meal's name is determined by the position of the sun in the sky, or whether its final digestion is achieved in a waking or a sleeping stomach.



He smoked two cigarettes as he read the paper, then had a bath and went to bed.

"She's comfortably settled in," he had told his sister. "We got a message through at the Garage."

He had never discussed with her the tangle representing his emotions towards his wife, towards cancer or towards the sister herself. There was therefore no reason to say either that he had done the ringing up of the Clinic or that he had evaded it.

All his sister said was: "You can set your mind at rest now."

As far as his wife was concerned, it was at rest, for it was, again, an absolute blank. The road to the Clinic, with its miles of bumps and tram-lines, its stops and starts and turnings were finished with. . . . He could do nothing; and now there was not even a sound in the house for him to listen for.

So he thought of Winter, and of the difference it might have made if it had been Winter instead of himself who had driven Kempthorne to the "Silver Horseshoe" and there seen Mrs. Hudson's Quail. As to the exact nature of the difference he had no idea at all. He knew only that it was enormous—as enormous and as sweeping as the curl of Winter's lip when his contemplation shifted from a "job" to any human phenomenon. The bigger the man who played any part in presenting the phenomenon, the more crooked and awry went Winter's mouth. Somehow, Hales felt, the mere name "Kempthorne" would have given the fellow something to play with and distort. "Kempthorne . . ." he would have said; ". . . H'm . . . *Kemp*-thorne . . ." Possibly he would have added: ". . . specialist . . . *Harley* Street. . . ." God only knew what all this would have been intended to mean. But there it was; and Hales rejoiced uneasily in the fact that there was no name on the job-sheet which Winter would find, if he was nosey enough to look for it, in the pocket of Kempthorne's car; and no signature.

Hales did not go to sleep.

Winter would be nosey enough to go speering about into every detail of that car; for it was not given every day to the men of the "Never-Sleep" to work upon a car like Kempthorne's, and Winter was, whatever else he might have been, a mechanic.



And he had already shown himself to be speering. His fussiness about the job-sheet had been altogether unnecessary, unless he had been trying, without advertising it, to find out the owner's name.

It was fishy, too, Hales reflected, the way the question of the job-sheet had come up in the same breath as the allusions to Mrs. Hudson.

He tried for a time, with his eyes shut, to count sheep going through a gate. Next he tried to watch the joint on a machine-belt as it followed its way—under the driving-wheel and then over it, over the pulley on the line-shaft, under it and back again. . . . He followed it till he could almost hear the slap of the belt, the slip and the bite of it; and they lulled him into not sleep, but a dull coma of annoyance at the way he had cooked up a possible mess out of nothing, fussing Winter over the Silex job-sheet, meddling in that Quail affair. . . .

The Governor would know (because the Governor somehow got to know everything) that the Quail borrowed for the demonstration had not been Mrs. Hudson's. He would perhaps ring up Mrs. Hudson—even, perhaps, after asking Winter if he knew anything about it. Or he might ask Winter to ring up; and Winter would get no answer at all, or an answer from the maid that Mrs. Hudson had gone away in her car. Winter had himself seen Mr. Hudson on his way to catch a train for the North . . . and Winter would know by now that the name had been withheld from the job-sheet of Kempthorne's car. The joint in the machine-belt went on its way—up, over, under—under, over, up; over, under—back again. . . . Hales followed it; and he watched the sheep dodging through the gate—and he saw Winter with his mouth awry, meditating on the rum way in which he, Hales, had behaved over the job-sheet, and the old-fashioned manner in which he had looked down his nose when Mrs. Hudson had been mentioned; for Hales himself could not now have sworn that his behaviour had not been rum over the job-sheet, or that he had not looked down his nose. Clearly he saw that he ought to have rung up Mrs. Hudson as the Governor had told him. Either she would have been in, or she would have been out—and that, in either case, would have been that as far as the Governor was concerned.

He ought to have made the job-sheet out properly, with



Kempthorne's name—for remarks from Winter that were statements were more tolerable than his questions; very often they contained less comment. They did not strike one forcibly and nauseatingly as a not-minding of his own business.

If Winter had not nosed his way into the affair, and in among the sheep going through the gate and behind the machine-belt with the joint that was no soporific at all, Hales would, perhaps, have finished with the sheep, and slept.

Perhaps he would have slept, but it is by no means certain; for there still would have been the Governor. There was this in common between Winter and the Governor—they were both apt, sooner or later, to find things out. The method and the mode of one were the method and mode of the scavenger; of the other, the mode and the flair of the collector. It was the natural tendency of men to conceal things from both of them; but whereas the tendency to concealment from Winter was based on an instinct to protect the thing concealed, concealment from the Governor was generally traceable to some groping to protect the Governor himself. Even when men had no idea whatever of what it was that menaced him they often lied to him, that so he might be spared from something and go his way in peace. For such is love, whenever it is other than lust for possession and dominion. . . .

But Winter had nosed his way in; and by four o'clock (instead of six) Hales was dressed and shaved and ready for the meal that heralded his day.

## CHAPTER XI

HIS sister drank a cup of tea with him, in the nearest approach to cosiness and intimacy that they had ever known. Their previous intercourse had been childhood and adolescence in a large family in Glasgow. Hales had come South and married and gone to the war, come back again and stayed South. He had been back to Glasgow twice during that time; for the funeral first of his mother and then of his father. This sister, four years younger than himself, had married, as the other three also had married. It was because her husband had died, while the husbands



of the other three still lived, that she, instead of either of them, had come to live with Hales and nurse his wife. Her son was at sea as a wireless-operator.

Never before had they sat down to a meal together without some other presence about them. For the question from Hales as to how his wife had been during the night had always conjured a presence as close as that of a sleeping person in the same room, so now the absence of any reason for him to ask the same question left him, for some minutes, dumb.

"If I wasn't going back to the place, Lil," he said, after these minutes, "I'd take you out somewhere to-night. You've stayed pretty close these last few months and could do with a treat. Maggie would be the first one to say so. She knows how much you've done for her."

"Well," said the sister, "she'd have done the same for me. Or her brother's wife; and I can wait for my treats."

Presently he said: "You know that this Doctor Kempthorne is one of the biggest specialists out on cancer?" He did not bring himself to the affectation of casually calling him "Mr."

"Yes," said Lil, "Dr. Thompson told me."

"So big," said Hales, "that you mustn't even call him 'Doctor'. You've just got to say 'Mister'."

"Yes," said Lil. "Dr. Thompson told me that, too."

She added, having looked a little closely at her brother: "Poor old Jim!"

"Why 'poor old Jim'?" said he, surprised. "What's wrong with me? Most people would think it pretty lucky—*mighty* lucky—the way this Dr. Kempthorne—*Mr.* Kempthorne—just came across me and took on the whole job of Maggie."

"How *did* he come across you, Jim?" asked the sister quietly.

Here indeed was a chance for intimacy—for expressing fancies and speculations and thoughts in process of formation, instead of stating facts or accepted fictions.

But he stuck to facts; they were easier. "A customer," he said, "recommended us as a decent garage to do a biggish job for him over the week-end. While he was talking to me Dr. Thompson rang up and told me the latest about Mag. I came off the handle a bit, and told him what it was about; and he said he was a specialist and said he'd



take the job on because Dr. Thompson was an old college chum." He handed his cup for refilling. "If that isn't luck," he said, "I'd like to know what is."

Neither this extremely wise and sympathetic woman nor her brother was narrowed or hampered, or in any way distorted by their belief in God. They each had this belief, however, as they each had a burr to their *r*'s and peculiar idioms in their speech. But Hales's *r*'s had less burr than his sister's, owing to his many years in the South; his peculiar idioms were rarer. And so, with the same God behind them both, Lil was in some way nearer to Him than was James. Her belief gave her a feeling of awe for His technique. She actually said: "The hand of Our Father is a wonderful thing, Jim," or some such words to the same effect; and Hales allowed the observation to stand unchallenged. It is perhaps because he was himself a craftsman and a technician that details of God's technique did not particularly impress him. Twinkling perfection in a tool warmed his heart far more than did mere skill on the part of the man handling it. It was not God Himself, therefore, that impressed Hales so much as did that perfect instrument of His, the driver of the Quail two-seater, she who had probably actuated the one whom you dare not even call "Doctor", and actuated him as precisely (and timed to the thousandth of a second and set to the thousandth of an inch) as a cam will actuate a rod, a rod a tappet, and a tappet a valve. . . . And there, still, was Winter, loose, like dirt, as a possibility to menace what might otherwise be some vague kind of loveliness and utter harmony.

Hales drank his tea.

Lil was finished, for the time being, with thoughts of God. She smiled at her brother. "The Garage would stop altogether, I suppose," she said, "if you were to stay away for a day or two!"

Hales ignored this. A sudden idea had struck him, prompted by a dozen different impulses, one of which was simply to make an adequate answer to his sister's smile. "We'll see about that," he said. The Governor's sending me up North for a couple of days next week. We can't do any good to Mag by staying here. I'll make sure of that from Mr. Kempthorne on Monday. You'll come with me, Lil. It'll be your treat."



He would not have meant the word "treat" as a joke even if it had been to Wigan that he was inviting her, instead of Coventry.

"Next week?" said she.

"There's just one or two things," he said, "I've got to finish up at the Garage first. Then we'll go."

## CHAPTER XII

THIS "one or two things" was one thing only, but it was a thing quite enormous—Winter. And in saying that he must settle it; it was as though a farmer had said there was just one thing for him to settle, and that one thing was blight.

He walked all the way to the Garage. Incidentally the afternoon was fine; but he would have walked, and no more glumly, through snow; for he was in no great hurry to see the fellow pawing over that anonymous job-sheet, to hear him speculating over the substitution of the strange Quail for Mrs. Hudson's; and yet he was inclined to hurry, pushed by the uneasiness which would be Winter's in trying to get answers to two questions, and trying to make one answer serve for both simply because they were simultaneous, and both unanswerable. So he hurried; yet he did not take a tram, which would have got him there a quarter of an hour sooner; for he had no ready excuse for encroaching on two hours of Winter's supremacy; and every action that had no obvious excuse could be, in the eyes of Winter, "funny".

And then it occurred to him that there was always one way in which Winter could be impressed.

He went straight to the cubicle, where Winter was drinking a mug of tea.

As his first move towards the impressing of Winter he said nothing, but only nodded morosely and moved across the cubicle, with unabated morosity, to his desk. He sat down, just barely modelling the breath he exhaled, into the words: "*Home* is a nice place to spend time in. . . ."

"Yes," said Winter. He savoured his tea as though it were a cherished poison. "Yes, I know what you mean, ole son. I'd like to know why it's always got to be the same chap that gets the dirty deal. You'd think that after



what you've had to go through, the last few months—well, I expect you'd best look on the bright side, though there's many a quack in Harley Street, by all accounts, no more fit to write out a bottle of medicine for a cow than our Mr. Harrison is fit to blow up a tyre. And draw a cool thou. a year for it. It's a rum show, Hales."

How much, Hales wondered, did the fellow mean by his allusion to Harley Street, and how had he got to know anything? He said: "Yes; I suppose Mr. Harrison does pull in about a thousand a year."

"Work it out," said Winter. Start with the salary which the Governor would be sure to give him, and then stick on, even a five-pound note, for every car shifted, and see what it comes to. And that isn't allowing for the oddments that's to be picked up in the Trade. Every manufacturer wants his car pushed on the Public instead of any other, doesn't he? And in whose hands is the pushing if not the Garage salesman's? Get me?" Even the last question, direct as it apparently was, was purely rhetorical. He himself answered it with a slow, gloomy wink. "There's not much you can teach *me*," he said; "and I, for one, don't blame 'em. A five-pound note is a five-pound note these times. Even to the best of us." He relished even the dramatisation of five pounds by calling them "a five-pound note"; and Hales allowed him to have it."

"Well," said he, "since I *am* here I might as well walk round the shop with you and see what's doing."

"There isn't anything doing," said Winter. "What should there be? *We* are not the ones who get the fun out of this job. Anything doing! . . . No, cully, it's the thousand-a-year chaps that get whatever's doing; the *outside* staff; not the ones that spend their time bottled up between four walls."

He could wait, thought Hales, to find out that he, Hales, was being sent to the Midlands for a few days—if he ever did find out.

They did drift through the shop together a little later, and not a word was spoken about the job-sheet or Kempthorne's car. They paused long over the job itself, and even Winter seemed to forget for some moments that man is vile, as they noticed that there is at least one design in the world that succeeds in carrying oil to valve-stems. He said: "She'll be up by morning, I expect. I'll take her



out on the road if she is, so you won't have that to bother about."

"I'm not bothering," said Hales. "I'm glad enough to have something to do."

Winter again responded, admirably, to the hint of self-pity. "That's right," he said, and then, quite patronisingly: "You'd best come along with me and go over the stuff the Governor handed out to-day."

They went back to the cubicle, and Winter produced from his drawer the cards on which he noted any observations made by Ingle during the day. They generally referred to improvements in the running of the workshop—the moving of a bench or a tool into a better light or a position of greater handiness. Sometimes they referred to an impression made upon the Governor by an advertisement or a traveller, which meant that Winter, during the day, or Hales, during the night, was to consider it or test a sample. It could be a hack-saw blade, a file, a paint-scraper, a portable crane for the break-down lorry, a lorry complete, or a scheme for insuring men, tyres or tools against dermatitis, bursts and theft.

They went through the notes together, and through the carbon copies of the day's job-sheets. Hales saw from them that the next thirty-six hours would be comfortably filled for each of the twenty-two hands on duty. The Governor had been amazingly right in catering, with full work on Saturdays and Sundays, for those who live by their cars from Monday to Friday and do not care to see them on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. These customers admirably balanced the City lot whose professional movements were made in buses and the Underground, and whose cars could therefore be doctored from Monday to Friday so long as they were roadworthy at week-ends.

At the end of their professional pow-wow Hales had a chance for more diplomacy. "No point," he said lugubriously, "in your hanging about here any longer since I *am* here. You've got a home to go to. . . ."

"Ta," said Winter. "Do the same for you any time, as you very well know. And mind, it's no use worrying, old man. Keep a stout heart."

Hales stared after him as he slouched away. "Worrying?" . . . "stout heart" . . . . He felt that he ought, in some way, to have understood what the fellow meant. All he



did understand was that he must play up to it by pulling a long face and mumbling about the desolation of his home. Thus, and only thus, had he been able to pack Winter off a full hour before his time. . . . As though "worrying" or "not worrying" were matters under his control. He peered—after Winter had gone and he was left safely alone in the cubicle—at an expanse of darkness that was the horror of pain; and because of its very darkness he could not go on, endlessly peering. Trying to focus a vision in that impenetrable blackness would produce a flabby emptiness in his belly to which there was a natural limit; so he turned over the cards of the Governor's notes that Winter had handed to him, and made from them some notes of his own.

The Governor belonged to the "Let there be light" school of creators. His was the mind large enough—and as rare among Napoleons of Industry as it is among housewives and hospital matrons—to allow workers to work. When he had said his "Let there be light", or "Let there be a little more light and let it not be direct in the workman's eye and blinding to him; but let it be cast upwards and then gently reflected down", Hales knew that there would be no nagging. If he needed help he knew that he could get it; but he knew also that if he did not need help he would get no interruption. So he could meditate upon the cards and make his own notes thereon with the freedom of an artist who knows that no one is likely to come and move the paint about on his canvas from the places where he has seen fit to put it.

In the making of all the adjustments and small alterations within the workshop to which the Governor's observations led, it was a matter of pride to Hales that they seldom called in outside labour. In matters of carpentry, bricklaying, concrete-work or glazing the "shop" was undefeatable in the persons of old Carter, who still called himself a wheelwright; of Hardy, who had been a riveter in Dublin till Ireland and the state of the shipbuilding trade had combined to make a Cockney mechanic of him, and to whom bricklaying, rendering concrete with a shovel, and glazing were a gift. These and other forces were at the disposal of Hales, and his particular contribution to the creations of the Governor was to juggle with them; to take old Carter out of his 'coach-room' and to leave the



coach-room still functioning, to take Hardy from his lathe and smoothly fill his place and the places of his successor and his successor's under-study; but there was no need, to-night, for any such manipulations, as the Governor's observations called only for tidying up, and other small matters.

Having looked through the carbon copies of the day's job-sheets and having sauntered through the shop at six o'clock, at eight o'clock he knew, with fair accuracy and without needing to go in and see, what every man ought to be doing. So he was able to stay in the cubicle to make his plans.

Three decarbonising jobs had come in during the day, and all three were travellers' cars that had to be done by Monday morning. Another two of the sheets indicated no more than the fussiness and sheer incompetence of the customers who had brought the jobs in. Winter had alluded to them as "our old pals" in handing over the sheets. Winter was possibly right; but Winter, to the mind of Hales, was of such stuff as the "Wolf, wolf!" story is made of. Hales, therefore, would examine the jobs for himself before saying that a couple of the boys should tackle them—with nothing more than the grease-nozzle, an oil-can, the tyre-pump and a polishing-rag.

One of the Governor's fads was that an essential qualification of the night typist was that she should be able to fry sausages and potatoes for twenty-five and brew five gallons of tea. This office she performed at midnight, when the complete crew mustered in the canteen. The scheme was one detail in the corpus of the Governor's cunning. Beyond the food value of sausages and fruit at midnight was the moral value of their dramatisation. The notice he caused to be pinned up announcing the inauguration of this meal was headed:

"Mechanics, like soldiers, march upon their stomachs." At the end was: "The meal and its service are NOT FREE. They must be paid for—(and will be paid for) with sweat and life's blood. Money will not be accepted as a substitute. We get this from customers because they have nothing better to offer." Thus were his employees set apart, in one more detail, from all other employees in the world.

The consumption of the sausages, potatoes, fruit and tea occupied about fifteen minutes, after which the more



sedate settled, in the manner of Clubmen after lunch, to read the latest newspaper they had been able to bring in with them. They enjoyed the obvious advantage over the ordinary Clubman of being about thirteen hours ahead of him in the matter of most news. The lightest spirits played darts and shove-ha'penny and dominoes, while the mediums merely talked.

A sitting together over food or drink is invariably for mechanics what the nineteenth hole is for golfers (provided that the term "golfers" is taken to exclude the merely ribald and *dilettanti* who somehow find their way to any bar, even if it is in a golf club). Their talk is "shop"; and not merely "shop" in general, but of the job just completed, in prospect or in hand, as of the round just played.

Hales ate his sausages and his fruit and drank his tea with the others. The only mark of his rank in the canteen was the fact that no one sat within the yard of table-space upon his left or his right.

When the darts and the dominoes had started and the three or four newspaper-readers had unfurled their papers, Hales lighted a cigarette and leaned across the table towards some talkers.

Charlie, who had guided him in the morning to the Quail, was engaged with one Titch.

Titch said: "Eye-wash! That's all it is, and it's only the Rolls class of job that can afford the labour on such rot."

"If you think it's eye-wash," said Charlie, "ask Mr. Hales."

The question at issue was whether the burnishing of ports could add to the sweetness of an engine's running. Hales turned to Titch. "The next time I hear you coughing, laddie," he said, "or clearing your throat to knock a bit of phlegm out of the way, I'll tell you it's just eye-wash. And if it isn't just eye-wash to clean a bit of roughness out of your breathing-tubes, it isn't eye-wash to clean up the breathing-tubes of an engine."

"Then why aren't they *always* burnished?" demanded Titch.

Hales shrugged his shoulders. "Generally isn't worth it. If a bloke is dying of a few other diseases, no one is likely to fash over his having a bit of a cough. But if it's the



Silex you're talking about, burnishing ports won't be time wasted. The gent that owns her would burnish them himself if he had the engine down. And he'd make a job of it, too."

"It was 'im came into the shop with you, wasn't it?" Charlie asked. "Sporty-looking sort of bloke. Sort of Member of Parliament trahsers on, for a toddle off for the week-end. Down for a bit of golf, I shouldn't wonder. There was some kind of a do over at the golf club to-day; I suppose there'll be a bit left over for to-morrow. Anyhow, he'll be able to shave himself and brush his hair in his ports and cylinder-heads by the time I've done wiv his old bazooker. When does he want her, Mr. Hales?"

"Monday, bright and early," said Hales. "I'll have another look at the valves and cams before you put her up."

"Another couple of hours will do it," said Charlie.

"Titch has just about finished the shoes and can give me a hand." Charlie paused; in the pause he exchanged a glance with Titch. Then he said, in the manner of a tired man prepared for the worst, but ready to face it: "I suppose you'll be wanting her taken out on the road when we've got her done?"

Hales smiled at him. "Nothing doing," he said. "I'll take her myself. But look slippy or the day blokes will have to finish her and take her out."

At one o'clock he nodded to a boy to press the bell-push.

Caps were picked up from tables and chairs or taken out of coat pockets and adjusted to heads. Evening papers were folded again into the small square blocks which mechanics consider the proper condition of a newspaper at rest. The bronze washers that took the place of coins of the realm on the shove-ha'penny-board were swept into their tin box. The last score, and a memorandum of the number of darts in hand, were chalked up, and the darts tossed to storage on the margin of the dart-board.

"There's twenty-two of you blighters," said Hales, walking down the room to the one who was packing the dominoes into their box with leisurely precision; "and one minute apiece makes twenty-two minutes."

The domino-packer smiled, and hurried. "Okay, chief," he said; for he was one of the younger ones, the generation utterly lacking in the N.C.O. complex. He would have retorted playfully, and cheerfully, even to Winter. Then



he said: "I'm hung up for a bit on that Chev. van. There's just one drum wants a skim out pretty bad, and the last chap who done it done it with a concrete-breaker, by the look of it. It'll want an oversize lining if I tune it up properly, unless you want to try one of those new liners."

"I'll come and see," said Hales.

### CHAPTER XIII

THUS, for another six hours, Hales was in his world, the block of the shop's glareless light in the night's darkness, the tinkle or clang of metal, the slap of belts, the whinnying of motors, the splutter of a welding-flame, the laughter and profanity of waking men in the larger world of sleep.

He "went and saw".

Often, while "seeing" one thing he would turn and say to a newly arrived questioner: "I'll be coming. . . ." (But he could always tell the man of something else that he could be doing meanwhile.) He moved in that light and in the laughter and ribaldry that blended with the chatter of metal and the chuckle that is of neither men nor metal nor of any tangible thing to be eliminated by oil-can or grease gun—the sound that theoretically exists not at all, but that exists inevitably when the power leashed to the needs of men is electricity. He moved briskly and full of purpose. The others knew that, even for a married man, he had a packet of trouble; and they felt that, somewhere and in some mysterious way, he must be taking it pretty hard—for the word "cancer" is enough to give pause to the lightest heart. It is an accurate blow upon the consciousness instead of the random shock conveyed by "something internal". Yet in his briskness, in his deliberation and his silences there was no more indication of flight and evasion than there is in a fish's movements (and in its silence) in water. It would have been said by some that he took his troubles lightly; but the fact was that his troubles simply were not. They were limbo; for him there was, apart from them, a world utterly complete. In that world there was no worry, for its questions were all answerable, and by movement. In that world things went wrong; they were bent out of the straight by misuse or neglect; they were straightened out of their proper curves; they worked loose or seized up tight. The question of



them was examined with a steel edge, with gauge or calipers. It was answered with fine tools and with the selection and detailing of men to wield these tools. Hales was more than the conductor of an orchestra. He was busier, and engaged upon a bigger job—for while he conducted he also composed—and recast his orchestra while it played. He was not impelled to his efficiency, as are so many fine soldiers and foremen, by any of that animosity which cannot bear to see men in a moment's idleness. When he hurled a loiterer from a momentarily idle lathe to a drill, or from the forge to the vulcaniser, it was the need inherent in the orchestration of his opus that drove him, precisely as it was no particular spite against a flautist that urged Mozart to keep a flute for ever on the alert. His job, as he saw it and did it, was thus as fluid as music, as plastic as clay; or, considering him as a painter, he worked not in tempera or oils, but in water-colours where fluidity and plasticity are combined. So, in the course of years and of natural selection, the men and boys who drifted to the night-shift were the pandexterous kind—those who could do half a dozen things adequately while doing one well. The one-job men were happier with Winter—for Winter's art was of the kind that works in stone or in oils; and those whose shift was split between Winter's tour and Hales's changed their characters daily at seven in the evening. From four till seven, under Winter, they were rigid as stone, specialists; at seven they knew that for any man to be worth his salt and his wage he must be mobile, a *tirailleur*.

Work, for Winter (which he did most admirably), was a matter of shoving a daily load, of shouldering a burden. For Hales it was conjuring. . . . And so the Governor was well served. The Garage needed a weight-lifter, as it needed a conjurer. It was the Governor's distaste of the idea of murder, and his having seen Winter and Hales trying to discuss some detail in the early days, that had led him to the thought of separating them and making two complete days, instead of one, out of every twenty-four hours. He himself had not the shoving power of Winter, nor the dexterity of Hales. Whenever he saw a man loafing (and enjoying it) his impulse was to loaf with him. When he saw a tangle of aims, the most he himself could do, with any immediate satisfaction to himself, was to go on



beholding it; and note its salient factors. The army had taught him these important things about himself; for he had noticed his complete worthlessness as a subaltern, his adequacy as a company-commander; and as a junior staff officer, he had recognised the immense value he would have had as a General.

Now he was a General.

Luck had given him Hales; and genius had led him to select Winter from among a dozen who would have appeared to most other eyes as no more distinguishable from Winter than from Hales. All wore caps and were clean-shaven. All had served, during some period of their military service, in the Motor Transport or Siege Artillery. All had brightly polished boots and wore hard collars on the occasion of applying for a job. All had flattened finger-ends. But Ingle could distinguish among other men, somehow, a man whose only emotion was a dull hate and the unhappiness to be derived therefrom, just as he had recognised in Hales a man whose motive was the impulse of a vague love. He knew that Winter would loathe slackness and skrimshanking and snarl them out of the workshop, just as Hales glowed or smouldered with a passion for order in every process, and for perfection in its result.

They both saw eye to eye with him when he had first suggested a waiting-room with a table and chairs, a gas-ring under a large kettle for tea-making, and a frying-pan and griller whereat lorry-drivers could, at any time of day or night, fry a chop or a steak or a brace of sausages. Hales saw at once how a system could be worked out whereby this room, its kettle, its pot-cleaning, its floor-sweeping and table-wiping could be run by the boys along with the petrol-pumps and car-washing; and Winter saw that it was high time someone did do something to give a knock to the filthy chop-house proprietors who fed lorry-drivers and van-men with leather-upholstered puddings of so-called steak and God-knew-what muck that only vinegar and pepper could propel down the human gullet. And to expect a man who spent ten, twelve or fourteen hours on the road to do it on sandwiches or bread and hunks of cheese. . . . It was no wonder to Winter that England would one day "Go Red". . . . But the free Rest-Room, with its tables and clean plates and knives and forks, its mugs and teapots, had long been a feature of the "Never-



Sleep"; and the "Never-Sleep" petrol and oil turnover, for just so long, had shown that even out of oil and petrol can money be made—if you can induce people to buy them from yourself, instead of from just anywhere (where there is no frying-pan and tea-pot, no newspaper and not a dog's chance of running into a crony).

From this idea had grown the five small bedrooms, the writing-room, and two bathrooms for travellers who had outgrown the feeling which transmutes the monotony of commercial hotels into a daily adventure; travellers who liked to have a job done on their cars while they slept, by men capable of doing it; and who liked dictating letters instead of writing them. They could do this also at the "Never-Sleep" at twopence a folio (a penny and three farthings of which went to the night-typist). Ingle's house-keeper took the care of the bedrooms and the cooking of breakfasts in her stride, and her five per cent of the "hotel" turnover, with her tips, set her most happily brooding upon a nest-egg.

Only two travellers had possessed livers sluggish enough to object to a neat attachment to their dictated letters. "Dictated at the 'NeverSleep' Garage, where the writer obtained a night's lodging, a bath and an excellent breakfast for the sum of five shillings. While he slept his car was serviced by mechanics who understand their job, and do not dislike it."

Hales generally saw the idea behind the Governor's dodges, and because he had belief in an ultimate harmony between departments and sets of activities, he approved. Winter, too, generally saw the idea; and because for him there was no bottom to the abyss of human idiocy and gullibility, he said nothing. What was there for him to say? . . . "They will like anything—*eat* it—lap it up, if you have the sense to hand it to them properly on a plate. . . ." He did not blame the Governor. Anything was fair in a world completely awry; and if the best way of selling petrol and oil was by lending teapots and dinner plates, and the best way of getting garage customers was running a glorified doss-house . . . well, it was on a par with coupon schemes for selling cigarettes. He wondered how long it would be before a double room or two would have to be added or substituted upstairs. "Demand and Supply . . ." was one of his stock comments on human conduct.



Thus it was that Hales found little comfort in the company of his chief colleague. His comments stumped him, having so much significance for the speaker of them and for him none at all. The remark "Demand and Supply", for instance, could produce in Hales nothing but a patiently-borne irritation, as though the fellow had persisted in mumbling that two and two are four and expected his listener to be impressed or disgusted or in any way delayed by the inexorable fact of it. Two and two were, for Hales, just simply four, and there the matter began and ended. It was no reason for him to tear his shirt, or chew his spine or drink his bath water or eat his young.

The great matters for him were: did a bearing, or did it not, get oil? Did a squeak mean some mere nothing—like a loose A.A. badge against the radiator—or did it mean that deformity or disease was at the engine's vitals? And did young Ginger's slowness over grinding-in a couple of valves mean that Curly was hung up, waiting for him? And if Curly was, for the moment, hung up, it was a chance to put him on a small radiator job that had been saved for him; for Curly could do more to a leaky old radiator in five minutes than any other player in Hales's orchestra could do in an hour.

In conducting this orchestra of his there was an ease and a grace within Hales which knew no sort of let or hesitation. It was only when the lights and the windows in the workshop began to pale that any uneasiness came upon him. The men by this time had munched a biscuit or a slab of sandwiches out of a sheet of newspaper, and had squatted on a running-board or leaned against a bench to drink the four o'clock mug of tea.

In another two or three hours he would be in that particular limbo again, where all kinds of noises went on, where there was movement, vague and disturbing; but where there was no particular answer to the questions made by the noises, and no sort of gear to link the movements together.

He knew, for one thing, that he would have to go and see his wife. And with the thought there came back to him the knowledge that beyond the windows, where the darkness of night and the twilight of dawn had become full day, was the world in which he had never been fully at home. In that world his incompetence beset him.



Some chaps, he reflected, as the light of the shop was balanced by the light of day—*most* chaps, he supposed—would have taken something to a direly-sick wife; some present. . . . But it would be Sunday now, and the odds were that he could not get her even a bunch of flowers. If he were to put his visit off, on this ground, till Monday, he knew that he would hurt her—and so he had to go. Then a thought came to him: he would drive himself to see her at Kempthorne's Clinic, in Kempthorne's own car. Vaguely, this sudden decision comforted him. The idea that driving to her in the finest car in the world should in any way substitute a gift of flowers was too remote to have had any direct influence on his decision; but it made the difference that he would go forth from the night which was his day into the incomprehensible and unmanageable world, companioned, and not altogether alone. There would still be about him some of the furniture of the clearly-understood and simple world of right and work uninterrupted. The irregularity of joy-riding in a customer's car did not greatly bother him; for that, too, belonged to the chaos of the world outside, where there was no system for doing things. In that world were only dodges and wangles. Kempthorne would never know; it would be no bad example to the mechanics in the shop, for the car would be gone before the day lot came on, and his own night crew would assume—if they thought about it at all—that he had brought it in again after half-an-hour's test on the road. If the Governor chanced to find out, wangling him would be a little awkward—but far less awkward than the contacts in most relationships outside the job. It was only Winter that really stuck in the way. He would know when the car went out and when it came back. He would say, possibly, nothing; or he would say enough to convey his approval. He would accept frailty on the part of a colleague who was going through a difficult time—and the only way that Hales could deal effectively with the obstruction of Winter was by deciding that he and his grin could go to hell.

\* \* \* \* \*

At a quarter to seven he drove the car away, remarking to Charlie that he was just running her out so that the day-shift need not mess her about. But he had not been on



the road a minute before he found himself facing the first difficulty.

He would have his tea as soon as he got home, and then his sleep. He would not go up to the Clinic till the afternoon, so as to get the car back to the Garage at about five o'clock—soon after the four o'clock lot came on. But the idea of leaving a car like Kempthorne's, for the best part of a day, at the kerb by his own front gate, was preposterous to the point of indecency. His foot tilted up from the accelerator-pedal as he hesitated before alternatives. The first was Becketts' garage in the Broadway where, a dozen years before, he had bought the spring for Ingle's magneto. It was still the same place, with three or four tyre-covers in the window, with the same old, odd stock of pump and lifting-jacks and adhesive tape, and an assortment of magneto-springs and contact-points in, perhaps, the same old cigarette-tin. There was a solitary petrol-pump added now, in the alley-way from the street to the garage and workshop, behind the showroom. But the workshop showed few signs of either "work" or "shop", beyond lubrication charts tacked up on the brick wall, and stagnant, sticky pools of oil on the floor; for most of the jobs that came its way were actually done at the "Never-Sleep". Thus Hales was known well enough to the brothers who owned the place and to the boys they employed to run it: and just because of this acquaintanceship the place, as a shelter for Kempthorne's car, was impossible. He felt easy enough in the borrowing of the car; but there were few things in the world that he felt were so completely easy as to stand up to the test of what he would have called, some years before, "speerin' ". The other alternative was the yard of one Mr. Knightley, a builder, at the end of his own road. Hales had often strolled into this yard on Saturday or Sunday afternoons, when Mr. Knightley had told him he would be tinkering with his old Humber, or painting it, or fitting a home-made hood. Mr. Knightley's habit of amusing himself in this way, and his cheeriness at finding anyone like Hales who would teach him dodges and wrinkles, had put these neighbours on excellent terms. Hales was fairly sure that this man had never seen the inside of a car like Kempthorne's, and so would welcome it as a guest in his yard. The only questions that he would ask would be of an anatomical nature; and the only puzzles



left in his mind would be connected with the Silex's lubrication system, her brakes and her running-cost.

Hales drove into the yard and looked up to the bathroom window, where Mr. Knightley was stropping his razor. Shaving, however, was not an essentially early-morning job for Mr. Knightley. It could be left till dinner-time, or tea, or missed out altogether for forty-eight hours, or over a week-end. Neither was the assumption of a collar necessarily precedent to his appearance downstairs. The things that really mattered he already had on—trousers, boots, shirt and an immense collar-stud. So Hales had not long to wait before he could say to Mr. Knightley, "Thought you might care to run your eye over this before I hand her back to the owner. And I'll leave her here till afternoon, if you don't mind. Save me running her back to the place."

"Help yourself," said Mr. Knightley. And Hales was almost startled by the simplicity of the transaction which left not a single question for him to answer. He rather hurried through his showmanship, giving to it little more than he felt he barely owed to his host and then—as he himself felt—"slipped off" home.

He heard the familiar gurgle of water flowing from a kettle to a teapot as he opened the kitchen door. He and his sister each said, "Well," and he added, "I washed at the place." This meant that she could dish out his porridge immediately. They did not smile, since there was nothing for them to smile about. But she said, in lieu of smiling, "It's nice and hot for you." She did not expect any chatter from him, and got none. He charged his spoon with oatmeal and held it in his bowl of milk for the seconds necessary to adjust the temperature to his palate. Meanwhile she stirred the teapot and poured out his cup of tea.

"I'll go with you to the hospital," she said, "to see Maggie, after your sleep. If you'd like."

"I'd like it fine," he said. They had discussed no suggestion of his going that day. "I've brought a car from the place, to drive up. Better than Sunday buses. We could go about three o'clock. I'd like to get back about five. I don't suppose they'll let us stop long with Maggie."

"Likely they'll not let us see her at all," she suggested. "That's why I thought I'd come. If it's going to be just the journey up there and back, you might as well have company as not."



All he could say to this was, "That's right." He saw how she had been a little afraid that he might shirk this business, if she did not start him off with the gentle push of assuming that he intended to go. He was quite prepared for her to back out of going now that she had found out what she wanted to know, for she had never been one to jump at opportunities of going to London. But she gave no sign of backing out. "It will cut down your sleep," she said, "going so early as three o'clock."

"Six hours in bed," he said. "Even day workers don't always get more than that."

Suddenly, after she had gone to the larder on some small errand or other, she came back and stood before him and said, "You'll be prepared, my dear, if Maggie can't get better?"

"Have you heard something, then?" he asked. "Did you telephone? Or Dr. Thompson——"

"No," she said. "I've heard nothing. But she's *bad*, Jim. And you must——"

"Aye. She's bad enough," said Hales. "I'm prepared. Don't you worry. I've been prepared a good while now. She couldn't go on much longer the way she's been." He was resolved to carry this discussion absolutely no farther, to answer no questions even, since all questions were unanswerable. But his sister, too, seemed to have finished with the subject.

"As long as you're prepared, my dear . . ." she said, "and aren't expecting miracles."

"The miracle," said he, "is the way she's stuck it, so far."

"You've been a great help to her," Lily said. "Without you standing by her the way you have, I don't know where she would have been."

Hales looked at his sister. She was obviously not just saying things for the sake of saying them. Her statement puzzled him. He grunted and said, "You think it does some good then—a thing like going to see her this afternoon?"

"My dear boy!" said she; "of course it does. Seeing that it is you who go. Some people's going wouldn't do any good to anyone. But if you were *not* to go——"

"Oh yes, I know," said he. "Staying away would be another story." And that, precisely, was the kind of thing



that represented half the difficulties of existence: your reason for doing *something* was that you could not decently, do nothing. And yet the thing you did was nothing except itself a difficulty.

He went upstairs and undressed, and yawned and stretched himself out on his bed. His sister had somehow given him a measure of ease. He did not worry about what he would do or say after getting to the Clinic, for she had got him to understand that the act of going was itself the thing that mattered.

## CHAPTER XIV

ALONG the road as far as Selfridge's the spirit and the body of Hales seemed to glide as smoothly as the car he drove along the gloriously empty streets. When he swung into Duke Street his sister was startled by a sudden movement towards the kerb which was almost a jerk, and a braking which would have amounted, in any other car and with any other foot upon the pedal, to a shocked locking of wheels.

At the same instant Hales said, "Damnation!" and a moment after, "God Almighty!"

"Are ye not well, Jim?" his sister asked.

"Well enough," said Hales glumly, "but a blithering fool."

Suddenly, and with no train of thought leading up to it, he had seen what an ape's figure he would have cut driving up to the door of Kempthorne's Clinic in Kempthorne's car.

He said, "We must find a garage."

The thought of paying money to a garage for the housing of a car for, at most, half an hour went hard against his grain. It went also against the grain of his sister.

"I can sit and mind it, outside," she suggested, "while you go in. They'd likely not want us both to go in together in any case. I could go in after."

It was not worth starting a lot of explanations and talk about the car, which she had so simply accepted as a very nice car. He said, briefly, "I can't go driving about in this, and leaving it at the door of nursing homes as though I owned it."

She took the explanation as good and sufficient. She had heard of specialists and of private nursing homes; and



of fees that are based on guesses as to the patient's pouch. "Don't drive to the door, then," she suggested. "Stop round the corner. I'll go when you come back if Mag is well enough to see me."

"A garage will be better," said Hales. "They may keep us waiting." He saw no point in risking such a thing, for example, as one of the Clinic's employee's being sent out to post a letter round the corner.

He was not going to *give* any money away at the garage, however. When he had driven in, and got out of the car and opened the door for his sister, he corrected any impression that might have been produced by the car, and by his best suit and felt hat and his highly-polished shoes. He said to the mechanic on duty, "Afternoon, sonnie. Room for a little 'un for half an hour, while I go and see to a couple of things for my Governor?"

"She'll do there," said the other. "You can have the ticket when you come back, if you're in a hurry now."

"No," said Hales. "I might as well take it now." If the proposed charge was more than normally outrageous he wanted to know it while there was still time to drive away and find another garage. But it did not exceed the conventional London banditry, so he paid it.

They walked out of the garage yard and already Hales felt that he was disconnected and lost, his movements a futility. His sister moved beside him; but she was different. There was an easy grace about her. In her mind there seemed to be an immediate purpose, and the movements of her limbs carried her smoothly towards simply fulfilling it. Even her clothes—the rather special coat and skirt of light tweed, sensible and carefully preserved shoes and small hat which Hales accepted as "up-to-date"—these seemed natural to her; whereas he himself, in clothes no more ceremonious than hers, felt all dressed up; fumbling and idiotic.

His wife looked better than he had seen her look for many months. She was untormented; and he wondered if she was dying. He kissed her forehead and sat down on the chair beside her bed and took her hand in his and said: "We'll soon have you home again, my dear. They'll know how to get you well, here."

There was a slight movement in the wan muscles of her hand, and she smiled. "Maybe," she said; and he knew



that she did not care tuppence one way or the other. He laid his other hand upon hers, holding it enclosed by both of his, but quite still; for just as there was no movement whereby his mind or his tongue could respond to the pull and the thrust of the forces which he felt all about him, so there was no movement possible for his hands. He could, of course, have given hers a squeeze—just as he could have mumbled the Lord's Prayer in all reverence. But would he have cut any ice thereby?

He looked down at the inert and waxen hand lying in his loose fists whose every line was delicately recorded with oil and immovable carbon. Something did pass between those hands, from one to the other, in spite of all their stillness and the stillness of his mind and of his tongue. The same had passed before—or the same which had been also different—when his own hands had been already graven with traceries of black, but hers had glowed with warmth and colour.

Tears splashed upon his hand.

He knew, from a sudden blinking, that the eyes from which they had come were his own. He felt a light pressure on his shoulder, as his sister said, "She'll mend here, Jim. Already she looks bonny."

"Aye," said he; "she's fine."

He knew that his sister approved his shedding of those tears.

Maggie spoke now. "They're wonderfully kind to me," she said; "the nurses and the young doctor. You would think I was *somebody*."

"They're like that," said Hales. He noticed now that Mrs. Hudson had always differed from the general run of customers by making him feel that he, too, was somebody. But she made even the boys at the petrol-pumps feel that they were somebody. "This Mr. Kempthorne is a *gentleman*," he added somewhat inconsequently.

His wife's hand did move now within his. Softly as the flutter of a moth's wing her fingers played about the gnarl of muscle that was the ball of his thumb, and she said: "There's one thing, Jim, you'll always be able to remember. Everything that could be done, you have done for me."

And his hands responded to her caress; for one of his torments of the past months had been the fear of discovery in his willingness to let her go.



"It was great luck, my dear," he said; but his modesty did not deny the truth that good luck is generally deserved. "And mind this——" he was inclined to stick now, but went on, "——mind this—you'll be doing that remembering too—yourself. They're going to give you a chance here. No operations in this place.

She was only half attending to his words. He had seen her, as he put it, "dopy" before; but now she was as though filled with peace, instead of dragged aside, exhausted, from torment.

He kissed her hand before laying it on the coverlet, and kissed her forehead again, and said: "Well, we'll be going on, now."

She smiled and closed her eyes, returning, apparently, to the peace which had been disturbed by her few moments of happiness; and Hales and his sister went out.

The Matron, true to the technique of her craft, "met" them in the hall. She told them that her instructions were only to keep the patient comfortable till the return of Mr. Kempthorne next day. His assistant was giving her injections, and Hales gathered that this assistant had broader ideas of comfort than their own Doctor Thompson.

"Mr. Kempthorne was called away suddenly on Friday," the Matron added, "to a case in the country."

Hales at first thought her a fool for saying that; and then perhaps not quite such a fool. . . . In either case he thanked his stars for having left the car under cover.

"By road?" he asked.

"Yes," said the Matron. "He is a great motorist. He goes everywhere by road. And is often away; a night here and there."

"My brother and I may have to be away for two or three days next week," Hales's sister said. "I suppose that would be all right."

"Oh yes," said the Matron. "If Mr. Kempthorne had expected anything sudden he would have given us different instructions."

"And she'll be pretty easy?" asked Hales.

"Well——" said the Matron, "it isn't an easy thing, you know." She had no particular wish to shatter the illusion that radium is a long-range magic that works unobtrusively from, for example, a phial on the mantelpiece. But illusions are illusions; she said, "You may be sure that



we'll make it as easy as possible."

Hales said, "Thank you."

"And now, Jim," his sister said when they were in the street again, "Aren't you glad you came, to see the poor dear creature?"

"Yes," he said, "of course I'm glad. I couldn't have just left her, could I?—Even if they're doing everything that can be done, and we only get in their way by coming—like an owner hanging about and asking silly questions while his job is being done, and telling you to mind the paint-work, and not get any grease on the upholstery."

His sister slipped her hand under his arm. "Yes, they're doing everything that can be done, laddie," she said; "but it's only you that can take her hand and tell her that you want her home, and well again."

And Hales thought it was more than could reasonably be asked of any man—to make the gestures and utter the words that should make someone else endure torments in order to live, or accept death in order to escape them. . . . And here was his sister, grand woman that she was, patting him on the back for his apparent cajolery of Maggie into the acceptance of a bargain which he himself could not honestly recommend as worth while. . . . But he had meant no such thing. He had meant only that he was sorry, terribly sorry for all this present mess of pain, and that he was mistily remembering a time quite innocent of it. Even if there had been some warm desire within him to drag Maggie through another six months, so that by her survival she might serve some purpose of his own, he believed that he would have been decent enough to suppress that desire, and let her go. And the truth of the matter was that he had no such private desire, for he was tired. He allowed his sister to go on approving, since she seemed to know what was best for his wife, but as to the theory of the whole thing, he just gave it up. This, then, was one of the spheres of human functioning that were quite beyond his powers. Winter, no doubt, would have got on splendidly in it. He might, possibly, have been unsympathetic or harsh or even brutal; but he most certainly would not have been stumped. He would have been glib and easy in his handling of the machinery; and even if his handling had been an unscrupulous misuse, it would have been due to skill, and not to idiocy.



As the sum of these reflections he said to his sister, "An uncommon, rum chap that mate of mine at the place, Winter."

"Oh?" said she; "what has he been doing now?"

"He hasn't been doing anything particular. He's just got that rum way with him. And he's got his knife in one of the customers, and is always on the look-out for a trip-up."

"And what way is he likely to trip up?" she asked.

"It's a lady customer," Hales admitted. "She and her husband are particular friends of the Governor. Winter doesn't like her."

"But what business is it of Winter's?"

"That's just it," said Hales. "That's what I mean about his being a rum chap."

"And what is she likely to be tripping up over?" his sister asked; "just the usual?"

"That's what *he* seems to be waiting for," said Hales. "But he'll have to wait a long time."

"She isn't that sort, then?"

"No," said Hales; and he said it so stoutly that anyone more vitally interested in gossip than his sister might have detected a challenge rather than a bare statement; "No, she isn't."

That exhausted the subject, for they were silent till they were driving again westwards along Wigmore Street, when his sister said, "It seems like a very nice car you've brought out, Jim."

"Aye," he said; "they say she's the best at her price. But I couldn't tell you a better at *any* price." The interval was still too short between the last subject of conversation and this one for him to tell her more about the car. He only said, "The owner wanted her tested properly before he calls for her to-morrow. I'll give the brake-linings a fair rub on the way home, for young Ginger to run his eyes over the adjustments again to-night."

But he could get no further yet, towards the world of young Ginger and adjustments, that were all so easy as to be responsive to the turning of a butterfly-screw, or the touch of a spanner. He was still where frictions were as remote as they were insistent: where you knew that something was binding—somewhere; but you could not say, for the life of you, exactly where. Something was always out of true; and you could not say what it was. And if you



did think you had found the trouble, there were no tools to your hand for adjusting a looseness, a tightness or a fouling. You could wince at the grating or the squeak, and curl away from the rattle and tremor. You could, in some peculiar way, enjoy them, as Winter did. But if it was not in you to do that, you had to shut up.

You could shut up. But this you could do only when the trouble was stupendous, when it was already achieved and had advertised itself into recognition, as "here", or "here", or "here" . . . as in the case of Maggie. This, indeed, you could do, because you could do nought else.

At other times you could not just shut up; for the trouble had not developed, but was vaguely threatening. Even the nature of the trouble was not yet defined; and the direction of its coming was altogether in the air . . . And at those times there was no shutting up and sitting still; because, simply, you could not. You had to do something to avert it; and all you could do was fidget.

Towards the end of Oxford Street, Hales said, "We'll have a cup of tea, Lil, so that I can go straight on to the place. I've got a few things that want looking after."

"Just as you like," said his sister. "But it wouldn't take any longer for me to get you a cup of tea at home; and I thought you were never in a hurry to get back before it's time for Winter to go."

He would quite willingly have changed his mind on the spot, to avoid further parley about Winter; but the question of the car cropped up in his mind again, and the impossibility of standing it outside his house for even half an hour—for people to stare at, and wonder what his idea was. And he could not very well take it into Knightley's yard again.

"I suppose you're worrying about this trip North next week?"

He mumbled something. He had not worried about the trip, any more than a fish would think of possible difficulties connected with immersion in other water. It was only people that kept on bothering him—people with cancer, people with rumness of manner, people with some largeness of personality (like Kempthorne's) which somehow took possession. It had taken possession of himself, to his immense relief; he had seen it take possession of Dr. Thompson and of young Carruthers at the Memorial Hos-



pital; and he had seen Mrs. Hudson's Quail waiting at the "Silver Horseshoe" in such a manner that its waiting could be nought else than mute obedience. And light-heartedness bothered him—the light-heartedness that could be so gaily reckless as to have left the Quail standing in a light bright enough for reading the print of a prayer-book, with a suitcase, undoubtedly, in the luggage-boot (on a Friday night!). Heavy-heartedness likewise bothered him, for you would have said, in a word, that what distinguished Mr. Hudson from Mrs. Hudson was a peculiar heaviness of heart. Not that he was ugly-tempered, or ill-mannered; but just heavy, and cold; lumpish, unsmiling—the sort of man whose coldness could make things pretty hot for anyone who might be carried away from ordinary moorings by the ripple of their own laughter.

It was just the kind of thing she would be up to, flinging along in the country somewhere, with the wind tossing a strand of hair across her cheek and setting her open collar a-flicker at her throat; laughing, to the quieter laughter of Kempthorne. They would talk—such people as Kempthorne and Mrs. Hudson—nineteen to the dozen; for talk came as easily from both of them as their smiles—and neither their talk nor their smile told you everything they had to tell. . . . Probably she would take his hand, and gaily swing it in hers as they strode over some heath or along some glade; and they would sit together on a fallen tree to eat sandwiches and drink from a thermos flask—and Winter's nosiness could start putting two and two together; and the bull-headed, cold pomposity of Mr. Hudson could make of it all some kind of dirty business.

These were the things on which he brooded.

Of the Garage and its thousand jobs, of the trip on which the Governor was sending him to the Midlands or of any dozen other trips on which he might see fit to send him, he carried no burden whatever. For the one lot of jobs he had the necessary tools, and he knew the language for the other lot he had no tools at all, and was dumb.

## CHAPTER XV

WINTER's attitude in lounging against a door-post could itself be some kind of a challenge and a threat. Probably



no one in the world could have enquired with more genuine interest for the latest news concerning Mrs. Hales; yet Hales would have been thankful if the fellow had not known of her existence.

His eye took in Kempthorne's car as he asked his friendly question; and the fact was that Winter could behold absolutely no human phenomenon without comment. Whether he spoke it, or shut his teeth together over it, made no difference. There the comment was. His utterance was, very often, no more than—"Oh! How d'you *do*?" and he could convey the same demand for some kind of defence by shifting the position of his cap on his head, or running his thumb along the line of his jaw.

As Hales got out of the car and joined him at the cubicle-door Winter made no gesture; yet Hales felt that something would have to be said about the car. He said first of all everything that could be said about his wife, and the wonderful place into which Dr. Thompson had been able to put her. Then, following the eye of Winter to the car, he said, "I don't suppose the Governor has been down, enquiring about this job?"

"No, mate," said Winter. "Besides, you could trust *me*, even if he had. You ought to know that."

Hales did know it; but found no comfort therein. He said, "The Governor isn't exactly one to be forcing us chaps into that kind of thing. I think he knows we wouldn't go doing things without a reason."

"Not he," said Winter. "He might just wonder, though, what the reason is—for taking out the best car we've got in the place, and are likely to have in the place for a long time to come; and keeping it out all day."

"Well," said Hales, "I haven't been *driving* her all day. I've just run her up to town and back."

Winter saw no rebuke, or else saw it and took it completely and quite easily. "Anything more to be done to her?" he asked.

"I'll get them to run over the brakes to-night," said Hales. "And she might have a tighten-up before she's dead cold."

"When's she being collected?" Winter asked.

"Morning, some time," said Hales. "You can tell the gent she's had a tidy run, if he asks."

"I never tell gents anything they *don't* ask," said Winter



cryptically. "And sometimes," he added, "I don't quite hear them asking."

"But you seem to jump to a lot of conclusions," said Hales.

Winter laughed with the utmost good humour. "Yes," he said, "I do. You're innocent, old man. That's what I call you—*innocent*. It makes me laugh sometimes to see it. Innocent as a new-born babe. Yet you *must* know what's going on."

"And what makes you think I don't know what's going on?" Hales asked. Winter was not, for some reason or other, annoying him.

"Oh, I don't mean in *there*," said Winter, and he indicated the direction of the workshop. "The blighters in there can't get away with anything where you're concerned; and they know it. It's *outside* that you're so blasted simple. Feed from the hand of any of them. They've only got to smile at you, and you're sucked right in."

"Oh well," said Hales; "does it matter? After all, the customers aren't any business of ours, as long as we get the jobs done."

"No," said Winter thoughtfully; "I don't suppose it does matter. But if it did matter you'd get nicely left, taking everyone at Face Value. You can't afford it, cully; not in real life you can't. People would walk all over you. Take your wife, for instance. You've been lucky by all accounts. Another sort of woman could have knocked hell and spots off of you. If she'd of smiled when she was doing it, you'd of thought everything was O.K., and no questions asked. I've seen you with that Mr. 'Udson's wife, for instance; fairly lapping it all up."

"Lapping what up?" asked Hales. "Have you seen me being anything but decent to any customer?"

"Oh, come off it," said Winter, at his most genial. "Yes—now you come to mention it, I have. You're not the same little bright little bit of sunshine to *Mister* Hudson."

"*Mister* Hudson isn't exactly a bit of sunshine himself," said Hales.

"The only thing about Mr. Hudson," said Winter, "is that there aren't any flies on him. He brings his car in here to get jobs done on it; and he sees that he *gets* them done. No fa-la-la business about it. But that's neither here nor there. You asked me a question, and I just passed the



remark: I've seen you pretty short with Mr. Hudson a time or two, calling one of the boys to see what he wants. It's been enough to make me laugh my guts out, knowing that you'd be all over the place, fairly busting yourself to do the same job yourself for Mrs. Hudson. And mind, you're not a skirt-chaser either; I'm not saying that. It's that ruddy *innercence* of yours; lapping up the face value. You'll get an eye-opener one of these days, with your Mrs. Hudson! you mark my words."

"If people went about marking all the words *you* told them to," said Hales; "we'd be down to using some other language by now."

"I daresay," said Winter. "But it doesn't do anyone any harm to be awake to what's happening. Mr. Hudson won't be as surprised as you, for instance. He's pretty wideawake. On the lookout, I shouldn't wonder. He's sometimes asked a question or two, about the Quail——"

It felt, for an instant, as though something small and alive gave a wriggle inside of Hales. Quickly he said, "He *would!*" Then, very calmly, "And what business is that of ours?"

"I'm not saying it is," said Winter. "But it is some business of his, seeing that it's his wife—and his work that turned out the dough to buy the Quail for her."

"That," said Hales, coolly superior, "is where you're wrong. It was an old uncle in Bournemouth who bought the Quail for her."

A sound, most unusual from Winter—most unusual, indeed, from anyone at all within reach or hail of him—issued actually from his lips. It was hilarious laughter.

"You are a caution!" he said, when he had recovered speech again. "You can say that as solemn as a prayer; but whenever *we* hear anyone say 'Uncle in Bournemouth' it sends us off the deep end—the wife and I. Her young sister spent about three years hopping off for week-ends from the Y.W.C.A. place where she lived in London. She had a very good job in an office in the City. For three years she couldn't go home for week-ends to her parents in Brentford, because she was going to the 'Uncle in Bournemouth'. As it happens there was an uncle in Bournemouth. A rich old sod who wouldn't have anything to do with the rest of the family after he'd made a packet out of some building contracts in the war. He paid



for having young Kathy taught shorthand and typing. The old goops—the wife's parents at Brentford—were pleased as Punch for her to be doing so well out of the old stiff in Bournemouth. He hadn't any family of his own, and was getting on. And she never came back without a decent bit of loot. Ear-rings, a bracelet, a posh suit-case, a fur coat. When it was a sleeping kit of silk like you only see when your luck is in at the pictures, they *did* wonder a bit. . . . But an uncle's an uncle; he had paid for her education, too, and he was damn near eighty."

"Well?" said Hales.

"Gawd bless my soul!" said Winter, and a slap upon Hales's shoulder would not have been inappropriate to his genial mood. "D'you think that's the whole joke? Boy, that's only the beginning of it. The joke didn't really come out, in full, not till year before larse. The wife and I were putting in a Sunday afternoon at Brentford, with her old people, when who should pull up in a chauffeur-driven Daimler but His Nibs from Bournemouth! The mother-in-law was a bit shaken by the long-lost brother business; and he was a bit on the sticky side, too. But she eased springs by looking for young Kathy to follow him in, from the car. Because she'd gone off on the Friday. Then she asked him, and he said, 'Kathy? Kathy? Why, of course, didn't you call that second girl of yours Kathy? She must be quite a young woman now! Let me see—ten years—twelve years—fourteen . . . Yes, let me see——' While he was seeing, we were all doing a bit of seeing, too. She's a bit on the bright side, that young Kathy, *I* can tell you. However, fur coats and silk pyjamas isn't *all* she got out of that job—pore kid! But there it is. You can't have it all ways, can you? And you can't exactly blame me for laughing when I hear about uncles in Bournemouth. It's as though you said you'd been to see a man about a dog—said it *seriously*, I mean. Get me?"

Hales did not quite "get him"; but Winter chuckled again. Then he said, "Well, I'd better show up in yonder again; you know what they are in there; and they're all alike. The best as well as the worse." He started off towards the workshop. After a dozen paces he turned and came back again. His chuckling expression had been restored by a reverie. "About a year ago," he said, "young Sheridan, who used to do some of the upholstery in the



coach-room, wanted to tell me of something he found in a pocket of the Quail. Mrs. Hudson had left it for some job or other, after a Sunday in the country. I happened to know that old man Hudson was away at the time, as he is now, on one of his business tours. But you know what young Sheridan is; and you've got to keep discipline, so I choked him off pretty smart. I didn't give him the satisfaction of telling me. But it's left me some guessing to do. Well"—he did not wink for the sole reason that a wink was not in him; "Well—I've got as far as two guesses. Two is enough." His joke was self-contained. It did not depend on any answer that Hales might have made, so he turned abruptly and completed his movements to the workshop.

It was half-past five. Hales's intention had been, vaguely, to go up and see the Governor during the hours which he knew the Governor usually had free on Sundays, between five and midnight, leaving out about an hour before nine for his evening meal. His excuse to his sister for hurrying back to the garage suggested that now was the time to go. Yet he had, when he came to think of it, nothing to talk to the Governor about. He could not go and start catechising him about the trip to Coventry; he knew the Governor would buzz for him as soon as he had anything to say. On another day he would, perhaps, have mentioned to Winter that he was going to be about the place for the next two hours, and Winter would have said, "Oh well—in that case. . . . Ta. . . . Do the same for you some day, mate . . ." and slouched off home.

To-day, however, he had had enough of Winter; so that even the effort of sending him home would have been disproportionate to the result. He observed that he himself was suitably dressed for an afternoon walk; so for a walk he went.

Without any particular intention, he strolled towards Hillcrest Road, in number thirty-two of which lived the Hudsons.

He knew the house well—or rather he knew its garage, for he himself had been to measure it and to suggest the small system for heating it with an oil burner. Mrs. Hudson had discussed it with him, following his arguments about the convection currents of the warm air.

Afterwards she had asked him to show her in which



direction to turn the coupling-wheel of the timing-gear of her still new Quail, in order to advance the ignition. She had then driven him up the hill and back again, to make sure that she had not overdone the adjustment; and he had assured her that only the true driver is interested in the spark as part of a car's movement.

The Quail, of course, had been her chief concern during that whole meeting; and yet it had come out in her talk that she was anxious for the old saloon to get its fair share of the new heating system. And Hales had noticed, while she drove, that the calf of her leg did not just shake and wobble, but moved with a ripple when her foot pressed upon the clutch-pedal, and when it released its pressure. When they got back from their testing-to-the-road there was a tray in the garage with a teapot and one cup. She poured out, and handed the cup to him. While he was still wondering how best he could make it clear to her that he was uneasy in the thought of drinking tea without comment while she drank nothing, and uneasy at the necessity of inviting her, somehow, to join him in the drinking of her own tea, she said, "Please don't wait. I've got another cup—of sorts—here." She whipped open the luggage boot and produced the top of a thermos flask. "And it isn't one of those wretched things," she said, "that go on burning your fingers to death, even after the tea is stone-cold." It was a mug of a new pattern, with an adequate handle.

Then, when they had drunk the tea, she snipped him neatly off with a remark about his being a busy man; so that his going was easy and smooth. No hanging about, forced, in the end, to ask if that "would be all", and to shuffle off like a dismissed plumber. That was the thing about Mrs. Hudson: she made you feel as big as you were. She thought highly of your job. She grudged you nothing . . . And yet had said no word, ever, that was in excess of simple decency, just as she had never brandished a half-crown by way of tip.

In walking up Hillcrest Road, past the house, and walking back again past it—and so looking twice at the garage's closed doors from the outside—he had no idea of trying to divine whether the Quail was, or was not, behind those doors. His idea was, purely and simply, to have a walk.

He did not expect, however, to see Mr. Hudson seated



in a deck-chair at the bottom of the garden, reading a newspaper; for Mr. Hudson had been taken to the station on Friday, implying that he would be away till Tuesday by saying that they could keep the car till then to do the footling little jobs upon it that any errand-boy could have done for himself in half a Sunday morning.

But there he was, and the fact was sinister—sinister as Winter's hint that his nose was set upon a trail.

Hales did not turn back, to pass the house a second time. He walked straight on, up the hill, and back to the High Street by other roads, arriving at the Garage five minutes after seven, to find Winter ready and in a hurry to go.

It seemed to him, as he pottered about among the papers on his desk that man was capable of few baser acts than reading a newspaper at the bottom of his garden when another man was assuming him to be doing business in some town served by the London Midland & Scottish Railway. Such a man was up to no good. Even the business of holding up a newspaper was a mere blind. His eyes did not see the print of it, for his mind was focused elsewhere, plotting devious courses to some dark end.

And Winter with his jibes. . . .

Winter, surely enough, was somehow "in" this. He had as good as admitted it. . . . "No flies on Mr. Hudson." If that had meant anything at all, it meant that Winter would not have been surprised or disturbed at finding Mr. Hudson in his garden when he had given it out that he would be in the North.

Hales went from the cubicle into the workshop; and through the workshop to the "wash", where finished jobs were left, ready for collection or delivery. There, ready, was Hudson's old saloon—which was not required, according to the statement on the job-sheet, till Tuesday evening. He himself had held it back on Friday night, and again on Saturday night. There had been practically nothing to be done on it—two or three hours' work, and a boy for a couple of hours—grease, air, and the vague playing-about wherein the more idle sort of mechanic loved to lose himself when there was real work to be done, and which customers of Mr. Hudson's calibre specified as "tuning-up". . . .

"Tuning-up"—when they hadn't the foggiest notion what



they were talking about. It would have done these gentry some good to know what six mechanics out of every ten did do to an engine in the course of this so-called "tuning-up"—kicking it from an idle and perfectly harmonious tick-over to a thundering roar on dry and shocked bearings. . . . Anyhow, there was the job, finished and ready, forty-eight hours before its time. And the only reason for this could be that Winter had deliberately shoved it forward. Or if he had not shoved it forward, he had allowed it to go forward; allowed a man to loaf, when there was *work* waiting. And the only likely reason for this was that Winter knew more than the job-sheet told; knew that Mr. Hudson was reading a newspaper at home and waiting for his car, instead of going about his business up North.

The aim of any collaboration between Winter and Mr. Hudson was something quite beyond the present imagining of Hales. But here, in the prematurely washed car, was evidence that collaboration must exist.

Casual enquiry among the shift produced no hint of Winter's manner in pushing forward the job; for it had been already finished, when they came on at four o'clock, by the shift that worked for Winter alone.

In the shop were the hundred-and-one questions that had to be dealt with with the utmost circumspection. Every one of them was apt to be a trap; the first questions put to him by the hearties of this shift were seldom—more than half of them—honest. They were either a sly criticism of instructions already given by Winter, or they were an invitation for Hales to make the criticism. But he knew the trappers and the tricksters of this shift now; and it was a long time since he had fallen to their wiles. It took about an hour to alter the tempo of the place, to substitute his own technique for the technique of Winter; and soon after eight o'clock he went back to the cubicle.

Often—and particularly during the past few months of his tangled, beginningless and endless meditations upon the obligations and aims of life as indicated by the agonised instance of his wife and his own mute incompetence to bear any part therein—often he had been struck by his isolation and his solitude at the Garage. It was almost as complete as the Governor's. Unless he cared to saunter out to the front and stand for a few minutes by the pumps and chat to the boy on duty, the gates beside the showroom were



closed, shutting him and his glass office away from the road and the traffic of all outside intercourse. A breakdown, a crash-S.O.S. or a dispute between a petrol buyer and the boy would sometimes call him out of this solitude, as the work in the shop sometimes called him out of it; but his solitude was seldom intruded upon. If the "shop" wanted him, it called to him on one of the bench-telephones. If the boy was in difficulties, he, too, buzzed. The Governor, the "shop" and the pump-boys were all three informed, by the glow of a small electric bulb, whether the foreman's weight was anywhere upon the floor of his "office" and within reach of their telephones, since this weight made the connection for the three electric bulbs.

Physical intrusion upon this solitude was therefore so rare that it was memorable. Kempthorne's arrival and the late visit from Dr. Thompson had both come in the same night; and each, by itself, was an occurrence in half a year. For the rest, when he was in his cubicle, he was as on a mountain top, or in a forest, or far out in a small boat—at sea.

A small boat at sea was the most like it. He had noticed the effect from the only spot from which it was effectively visible—the end of the upper showroom at the bottom of the five steps to the Governor's private lift. The upper showroom was itself a mere gallery, suspended, at nightfall, in a cavern of dusk or darkness. Its end had been left unwalled, against the time (which had now arrived) for its extension over another forty feet, to cover the top of Hales's office.

At present, however, the appearance of the cubicle from above did justify Hales's image of a boat at sea; for it was a clearly defined and minute thing against a vastness—light, sharp-edged and brilliant, against vague night.

Often, when coming down from a talk with the Governor, he had paused for some moments to gaze through the darkness enveloping the dim shapes of Mr. Harrison's "motor-cars", at the tiny world projected into it by a solitary twist of white-hot wire.

Whenever Hales himself had gazed in meditation upon that world, it had been empty.

Whenever Ingle, its Governor, had gazed upon it, it had held its population—Hales. And the Governor had been struck, even more than Hales, who always looked upon



utter emptiness, by the sense of that small world's isolation. Often the Governor had smiled at the fellow, perched up on the high stool which he preferred to any kind of chair, looking through job-sheets, digging in one or other of his files, indexing the details by which he, Ingle, gauged the life and measured the pulse of his famous Garage. Gazing thus, the thought had first come to the Governor that he might liken himself to Solomon the Wise. He (the Wise One) had devised a crudely engaging dodge for the getting of a thousand sons; whereas he (Ingle) had achieved the same lofty purpose through a dodge more simple still. The thousand was, in both cases, round figures and brag. In the case of Solomon, it justified the lavish equipment (as specified), with due allowance for "spares". In his own case it was mere exaggeration—for, even counting the petrol-boys and the girls in the office, his sons numbered but eighty-seven.

It was when looking, unseen and unobserved, through dark space upon the busily-bothering Hales that he glowed most warmly with the glory that was Solomon's, and felt the comforting weight of that prodigious fatherhood. And it was small wonder that he smiled. Smiling, he knew that in his soul he must touch wood, for a man could not go on for ever spotting winners in the way he had done; but even so, he had to smile. . . . It was he, and he alone, who gave his sons their life; for it was he who gave them *Things*. For men—for all males, except the freaks who clothe themselves in one sort of fancy-dress or another, either as to trousers or necktie or side-whiskers or talk—life, for normal men, is things and things only. It is smiting a ball well and truly—either far, or straight, or correctly adrift within a hair's breadth to right or left; it is the hewing of rocks and the assembling of the pieces into piles of one sort or another—bridges, town halls, railway stations; it is the harnessing of a power to make sparks and dazzling light, or to rotate some small wheel for the turning of a greater one; it is the taking of metal in dull ingots and jagged shards, forging it and trimming it, grinding it and buffing it to a purpose that was sheer balance, or what these hearties of his called "face" or "true". Why—God alone knew. But there it was; and there was no getting away from it. Alcohol and sexual entertainment, champagne and oysters—these were all very well; they were, perhaps, even



the bread of life—so long as it is recognised that man cannot live by bread alone. Life, for man, was essentially things. (By “man” he meant accurately man as distinct from woman; since, as to the essential aims of the individual female—again, God only knew. Women briefly were a baby’s gadget for producing another baby and so handing on the undying blow-lamp.)

Solomon, with his mass-production workshop, punched out his host of sons and was, thereafter, done with the job; but he, Ingle, took on where Solomon left off. He had chosen his sons ready-made: by accident, as he had chosen Hales; from the labour exchange; sniped them from other garages; from advertisements. Generally, when he found them, they were physically alert enough and ready to be born—eating, sleeping, signing on at the labour exchange, reading the newspaper, even propagating their kind, cursing their luck. But spiritually, as yet, they were not. They had no so-called “work” which was, looked at in another and truer way, no “play”; for although they had all else they had no *things*. They were a mere egg, alive only in the sense that they held a possibility of life. For fertilisation the egg needed things, and he had given them. Thus they were, in truth, his sons.

They had turned out well, lusty to a man—each one in his way; and among them Hales was his first-born.

He saw in Hales, fore-shortened in his boat or on his island of light in the domed night, a man just digging and scratching, like poultry after sustenance, in search of some morsel that would send him scampering back to the life that lay for him beyond the workshop doors.

Those were the times at which he had smiled in his contemplation; but of late, and for many months past, he had smiled not at all.

Hales had not scratched among papers or dodged about in the light of the cubicle. He had just sat there, numb and heavy and stunned: dull instead of droll.

## CHAPTER XVI

WHEN Hales had done his hour in the shop and spent some minutes in the isolation of his cubicle, his telephone buzzed, and he said, after a moment’s listening: “Very good, sir.



Now? Yes, ten o'clock's a good time, sir. I'll come up at ten."

That, at any rate, was a vague removal of a bother that was vaguely on his mind—the necessity for seeing the Governor.

At ten precisely he told Hargreaves in the shop and the boy at the pump where he was going, and let himself into the lower showroom. He passed by the famous family again—the baby, the ten, the twelve, the sixteen and the twenty. He glanced at the tiny sports model, now canted up almost on its side in the window, that the subtlety and refinement of breeding in the twinkle of her under-works might appear to passers-by—subtleties concerning which he would answer many questions as soon as the school holidays had started and Mrs. Hudson's boy was home again.

He climbed the spiral stairway to the gallery of second-hand stock—the upper showroom—and paused at the steps below the lift. In realising that by the end of the next week the gallery would, most probably, have been extended into a complete floor, making a ceiling for his cubicle, he felt some regret. His isolation, the sphere of his unchallenged solitude, would no more be visible to him in its dramatic form. His office would no longer be a raft of light in a sprawl of darkness and half-light. It would be just a glass room.

Already there was a girder spanning the cavity that was darkness above the cone of the light-reflector—four tons of clean steel that had rung with the chime of a bell when the contractors' men had hoisted it into position on Friday. Winter, telling him of it, had admitted the skill of the Geordies who had come from the Tyne so that no stranger should handle the thing; and had told him of the amazing derricks they had brought, mounted on lorries, to swing it up twenty feet, as though it had been a pea-stick at the end of a string. It had been the best part of a day's work. It would be another three or four before the other three were up, ready to take the cross-members—and before they started their mess of concrete-mixing and spreading.

One of the common sayings in the Garage was that the Governor never worried. Hales was a little surprised, therefore, to find him seated before a desk upon which was none of the material usual for his entertainment and their



discussion. It was bare, save for an ash-tray and tobacco-pouch and match-box; which was fishy. It showed that whatever occupied his mind was provided by his mind itself. And he said, in a rather peculiar way: "Sit down, Hales. I want to talk to you."

Of course he wanted to talk to him. Else why send for him? But what about? Usually he said: "About that lubricating plant, Hales. . . ." or "About doing our own boring, instead of sending out. . . ." or "About getting those confounded boys to wash with soap and water instead of petrol . . ." anything to show that his thought had a clear and immediate objective. But when he just said vaguely: "I want to talk to you," and "Sit down," it showed that his objective was not clear—and that, as Hales knew, constituted worrying.

"It'll take some time, Hales," he said, and produced a box of cigarettes. They were the same cigarettes as Hales always smoked, but they were in a box instead of packets. Hales took one and lighted it, suspicious. The Governor was in a fix. Inspired, Hales said: "It isn't bad news for me from the Nursing Home, is it, sir?"

"Nursing Home?" said the Governor; and then: "No . . . I'm sorry. I meant to ask you. You have had some news, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Hales. "I was over this afternoon. She's pretty comfortable at last. Nothing to do with the cure yet, I suppose; most probably dope. But they seem to know what they're at."

"Yes," said Ingle. "Kempthorne's a great man. It's lucky to be able to shift a job on to about the best man at it. You ought to feel mighty pleased with yourself."

"I am that," said Hales. "I don't know what I'd have done without that bit of luck."

"You feel now, I suppose," said Ingle, "pretty much as an owner feels when he's run his car in here. . . . But it's about that that I want to talk to you—the famous 'Never-Sleep' Garage." He paused, engaging himself with the recharging and lighting of his pipe. "We've grown too big, Hales," he went on. "We've grown up. We're like the parents of a daughter who is attractive and has suddenly become marriageable; and we're the daughter, too, as well as the parents, which makes it rather difficult. I've been approached, Hales, by 'Link Garages, Limited'. They



want to make us the nineteenth of their chain. We're too much like them, they think, to be healthy competitors. They've got a place on the West Road; one on the North, and one on the Watford by-pass. They're thinking of putting one within hail of the 'Silver Horseshoe', with the idea of collaring the bathing-pool public, and some of the dancers and diners. And they think we have got the best pitch between that and the West Road. They want, for some reason or other, to complete their ring around London. Strikes me as a purely geometrical idea. But they're offering a hell of a lot of money."

He was silent, but did not, apparently, expect any remark from Hales. Hales offered one, however, "You, I suppose," he said "would retire?"

"Not necessarily," said Ingle. "They'd prefer me to, I suppose. But they wouldn't insist. They'd make me a Director on the Board and manager of this branch. *Branch*, Hales. How does that strike you, when we've been thinking this is a whole vineyard?"

"Would you like to retire, sir?" Hales asked.

"My dear fellow," said Ingle. "Where, or how, could I retire further than I am already retired? It's like asking an old Colonel who has retired into rose-growing, if he'd like to retire—from rose-growing. Don't you realise that I retired about eleven years ago, when I bought your old muck-heap under us and planted this garden of roses on it?"

The Governor's jokes were all very well when you could see their point. But this, with its preamble of "Sit down, Hales. . . . It'll take some time. . . . Have a cigarette. . . ." and all that ceremonial business was a serious question. So was selling a garage a serious question. They weren't a joke about rose-gardens.

Hales said, a little crustily: "Whatever you care to call it, then. 'Going into business' instead of retiring. Would you give up retiring and go into business—by settling down in the country, or in London?"

Ingle said: "I'd stay on here. But you would have to retire. They would raise your pay a good deal, shorten your hours and make a sort of office gent of you; what the Americans call a 'White-Collar-Man'. You would become a hell of a fellow; but you would get things like those old routine-orders every day or a couple of times a week, tell-



ing you exactly how to do your job. How would you like that?"

Hales shrugged his shoulders. "I've had to work for bosses before," he said. "I could do it again. I mean——" he saw that he had said something a bit out of the way, implying that the Governor was somehow inconsiderable, not a real "boss". "I mean—you know what I mean, sir. Like the army."

"Yes," said Ingle. "Hypnosis. Conjuring with billiard-balls instead of playing the game of billiards with them. You won't see quite what I mean about the billiard-balls, because it's rather far-fetched and I don't altogether see it myself. But the point is that they're offering a hell of a lot of money. It's that that sticks me every time."

"But—you'll excuse me asking," said Hales, "you're making plenty as it is, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Ingle. "Plenty. That is, enough. But it's all been so easy, and now it looks as though it might become different, and difficult. Of course, the beggars may be just bluffing; but they say that if we don't merge with them they will put up a place opposite the 'Feathers', less than a mile down the road. It is essential, they say, to their scheme. And then where will we be?"

"Still here, I shouldn't wonder," said Hales.

"Bravely spoken," said Ingle. "But it'll bring a fight into it; and I'm not sure that fighting is going to be much fun—compared with the fun we've had so far, just doing things for our own benefit, and our customers'!"

"Well, we can go on doing them," Hales suggested. "Every one of them has turned out right. You haven't had any fads at all, sir. Everything you've done has been sound, and if you go on doing that you'll be giving them something of a fight to go on with, and you won't even know you're doing it; so it needn't bother you. And besides, if you ask me, they're a lot of half-baked idiots, to think of starting up where someone else has got all the business already. Why don't they go somewhere where there isn't any decent garage?"

"Because," said Ingle, "they are Big Business, and it is the principle of Big Business to reap rather than to sow. If they go where there is no garage they may be going—for all they know to the contrary—where there are no customers for a garage. We have shown them that there



are customers here; we, in fact, have populated the place with customers; so they feel there's very little risk of drawing blank. All they've got to do is take over our customers ready-made."

"If that's the idea," said Hales, "I should think they'd be welcome to all the customers they'd get."

Ingle smiled. "It isn't a personal matter, Hales. You can't get rid of the problem by saying to customers, all 'aughty-like. 'If you love another—go . . .' Nineteen garages and nineteen service stations mean nineteen sources for second-hand stuff—for 'Models', as Mr. Harrison calls them—and we have only one. 'Models'—second-hand stuff—are the guts of the motor trade. They are its currency. And these beggars can afford to take anything in, because they've got nineteen possibilities for getting rid of it. They've got the Street behind them, too; and Euston Road and the slaughter-houses."

"Well," said Hales, "we've got on very well without G.P. and the slaughter-houses so far."

"Yes," said Ingle. "One does get on quite well without an umbrella, till it rains."

"You're forgetting our *Bridge*," said Hales, with sudden inspiration and confidence. "I told you at the start that it was the Bridge and the death-trap corner, and the bend in the road that would make us. These garages are just beginning to tumble to the idea that you must first slow cars down before stopping them by saying 'Garage' or 'Petrol two hundred yards ahead', instead of expecting people to pull up dead when they're coming along, all out. These 'Link' people were about the first to start that idea of slowing people up with notices—and then the fools go and stick their places up on the straightest and finest stretches of road where anyone with anything of a car just steps on it." And now Hales laughed. "If they'd asked me to choose a pitch for their opposition show I wouldn't have chosen better or different than the place they've chosen for themselves, opposite the 'Feathers'. It's about the most expensive site between here and Oxford. They'll have to pay as much for the ground as we—as *you*—have paid for this whole shooting match; and you can see a mile of clear, straight road on either side of it. What the ordinary motorist does when he sees a mile of clear road isn't stop for oil and petrol, and to look at second-hand cars in a



window. It's 'let's see what she'll do!' . . . God—sir! I wish we could be sure that that is the site they're going to buy."

"We can make sure," said Ingle. "I'll ring up the agents and make a modest offer for it myself to-morrow. But damn you, Hales, we've started off fighting already."

"Oh well," said Hales, "if you call that fighting!"

"And the next move will be from the enemy," said Ingle. "They will offer you twice the money you're getting here to go and join them."

"And they can put it——" said Hales.

"Quite," Ingle interrupted him. "A noble thought, nobly expressed. But you can see that fighting is going to be a different job altogether from the one we've been doing. There's another point; it is said that in business you can't stand still. You've either got to go forward or go back. There's that piece of land near the 'Silver Horseshoe' for which the 'Link' people are negotiating. The agents have already got on to me, wanting to know whether I'm in the market. It's a chance which most people would consider. You know, we've done pretty well with this one show here. Most people would say that just because we have done well here we ought to take on the other. It's funny; they're a moral lot of beggars, too. It would never occur to them to argue to a happily married man that because he is happy and successful with one woman he ought to take another as well."

"You don't think of taking on this other place, then?" Hales asked. He was occupied less by the question of expansion than by the way in which the 'Silver Horseshoe' kept cropping up.

"It's a funny thing," Ingle mused, "but I'm coming to the conclusion that men actually prefer monogamy—psychologically, I mean. No. I'm not attracted by the idea of a harem of garages. Are you?"

Hales was defeated by the question. "I?" he asked. "What's it got to do with me?"

"This," said Ingle. "I might ask you to go and run it."

"Well," said Hales; "I'd go. Mind you, I'd like better to stay on here. But I'd go. It's not much odds."

"Or Winter could go," Ingle suggested.

Hales said: "Ah . . ." or, more accurately, "Ar . . ."

"Yes," Ingle repeated, "Winter could go."



"Have you asked him, sir?"

"No," said Ingle. "This is just a discussion, by the way. A private and confidential discussion. Without prejudice—between you and me."

"Thank you, sir," said Hales. "What I meant was that if you wanted to shift me to another job, I'd go quite willingly. I don't fash myself much over that kind of thing. I take what comes. And you needn't bother about me and Winter. We rub along quite well together, leaving each other alone and minding our own business. There's been no trouble for about three years; since the time he brought up that bit of bother with you and asked you to say which of us was 'senior'."

"I remember," said Ingle. "I said you were, didn't I? Because you're immemorial, you know. You're the artist and altruist type. You've got your second wind. You're not concerned with personal happiness. You're puzzled. Winter isn't; he is still concerned with personal happiness. That's why he's bad-tempered sometimes. When people still get angry, it shows that they haven't finished cutting their teeth. The world is still at the nursery stage for them. They keep on breaking things by messing about with them. And then they cry. They're a rum lot, the unbroken-hearted. That's why I'm worried about this merger scheme, and wanted to talk to you about it. It seems to me that I'm going to get involved in the nursery part of the world again, when, as I told you, I've been living in an adult state of retirement ever since we put up that corrugated iron on the ground under us here, and bought that petrol-pump and lathe and vice and drill. I haven't interfered with anything—or broken anything since then. I've just done what has been asked of me. When people have wanted very ardently to sell things to me—good things—I've let them. When people have wanted very much to buy things from me—I've let them. When you chaps have asked me for anything in particular, I've bought it for you. And there you are. It's just been the old Colonel looking round his garden. If it's dry, he gets out his watering-can. If he's challenged by green fly, he squirts something on it, following the directions on the tin. You see what I mean?—This fighting business is going to be a different sort of job altogether. I don't say it isn't as much fun for those who like it: but it is different; it is making up the stuff to put



in the tin and writing the instructions—instead of just reading and following them.”

Hales offered no comment. When the Governor “was off” it was just as well to let him go. He would arrive, sooner or later, somewhere, and say something that did make obvious sense. This pose of his, of almost dithering incompetence and cool carelessness, had often caused Hales considerable embarrassment. There were people who accepted it, and had held—in the workshop and in the canteen—that all the Governor ever had to do was sign cheques and make pleasant remarks; and since the Governor was himself the authority for this view, it had often been difficult for Hales to discourage it. In the old days it had been particularly difficult with Winter; but he had shut Winter up, for good and all, on that score—and not by argument, but by just saying “All right. You go along and tell the petrol-boys about it. They, too, think they are the guts of this place. They might not agree that it’s really you; but they will agree that it isn’t the Governor.” It was seldom that such inspiration came his way; and even now, after some years, remembering the way Winter had slouched off, he smiled.

“But they’ve rather got me both ways,” Ingle continued. “If I sell and stay on with a fat salary, it’ll be giving up my retirement and going back to the nursery stage. Probably board meetings now and again. If I tell them to go to hell, I’ll only succeed in keeping out of their particular nursery. But they’ll start down the road here and put up no end of a fight—and we’ll have to start learning children’s games at which to beat them. Or there’s selling out altogether . . . I don’t know . . .”

Hales now was able to join in. “It seems to me,” he said, “that the fight, as you call it, would be best. Let ’em start up along the road here. We’ve got the Bridge and the corner on our side. Every car that passes us is crawling at ten miles an hour——”

Ingle smiled. “A nursery thought has already occurred to me,” he said. “When they have put up a sign the other side of their place, ‘Petrol and Service, 200 yards’, we will put up a sign, ‘More Petrol and Service, one mile—at the end of this stretch’.”

“That’s right,” said Hales. “And another thing, sir. Our customers. . . . Our connection. You can say there isn’t



any such thing as a connection, but I know better. There's Mrs. Hudson, for instance. Do you think another garage coming here could make her leave you?"

"I don't think," said Ingle quietly, "that a dozen garages coming here could make her leave *you*, Hales."

And Hales, in a blur of feeling most sudden and peculiar, forgot that of which he had once or twice reminded himself during the conversation—a figure, seated in a garden not two miles away, brooding sinister over a newspaper, while it ought to have been in the Midlands or the North somewhere. He forgot it utterly. He did not look at Ingle; but he collected himself and said: "Well, customers like that wouldn't leave us."

"Customers like that, Hales?" The voice of the Governor had become curiously gentle. "Have we many customers—like that?" Hales was aware, somehow, that there was no hurry for an answer; aware, indeed, that the Governor wanted none; for his very tone had been an answer, and Hales was terrifically glad. He said, however, to show that he was sober: "Well, I don't know. What I meant was that there's recommendation. Take Mr. Kempthorne, the specialist, who's taken up the case of my wife. He came out all the way here because some gentleman at his club had mentioned us; and he couldn't even remember the name."

"Oh!" said Ingle. "A gentleman at his club . . ." Then he chuckled and, under his breath so that Hales could scarcely hear it, he said: "O Phyllida . . . Phyllida . . . Phyllida . . ."

Hales would not have heard it; or, hearing it, he would have made neither head nor tail of it, if he had not once, several months ago, heard Hudson pompously say to his wife: "We've very little time, Phyllida. . . ." And the name had stuck in his mind as an unusual, somewhat high-falutin one.

So he wondered now what the Governor knew and meant and felt, as he sat quietly gazing through the smoke of his pipe, his lips still lingering in their smile over the last faint sound they had uttered.

And Hales, as well as being happy, was terribly anxious. He had to say: "Do you think it wasn't some gentleman at his club that recommended us then?" but he said it very soberly and stuck "sir" on at the end of his question to steady it up completely.



Ingle looked at him—and, for some moments, went on looking, in a slightly disconcerting manner. Then he smiled quite broadly and with all his old friendliness. "Hales," he said, "we're garage-men. Our concern is with people's cars, not their friendships—and all that sort of thing."

That was all very well, thought Hales; it "was the Governor again". But what he wondered was whether, since he knew something, the Governor ought to know also that Mr. Hudson was lurking about in an empty house when he ought to have been up North.

He said: "Perhaps it's the Hudsons who knew this Mr. Kempthorne."

"As a matter of fact," said Ingle, "Kempthorne and Hudson were at school together."

It seemed that Ingle could say nothing that should not be some kind of a shock to Hales. He went on: "To carry the matter one step further in the direction of nowhere, I was there, too—all three of us—chaps together." This last, from anyone else, would perhaps have sounded bitter; but the Governor was quite normal again as he laughed at Hales and said: "So you see—these enormous, world-wide ramifications of connection on which you want me to stake my all can boil themselves down to just exactly one loyal customer and three little lads from school."

Hales responded to the mood. "Well," he said, "that makes two already—with Mr. Kempthorne."

"I notice," said Ingle, "that you don't count Mr. Hudson in. Or is it Mrs. Hudson that you're leaving out?"

"No," said Hales. "I think most cars and most garages are pretty much the same to Mr. Hudson. They don't worry him much. He seems to think a lot of Winter, though."

"Critics," said Ingle, "are always like that. Those two belong to the 'critic' class. Critics are the only people who do think much of each other, and pay any attention to each other. They alone think that criticism is of more consequence than the thing criticised. Well, they can have it, as far as I'm concerned. Disagreeing with the Prince of Denmark, I say that the *Thing's* the Thing; and I rather think that you agree with me. And since the challenge has gone forth to Link Garages, Ltd., we will let them build their palace down the road here, and be damned to them. You were right, Hales, in your prognosti-



cations about this place. There's no reason why you shouldn't be right again. All I'm giving up is the *certainly* of dying a rich-ish man. . . . Well——"

This, again, startled Hales. "But, God Almighty, sir!" he said. "Don't put it on to me like that. It's your money, not mine. If you want to make sure of it, you sell while the price is good."

"Oh, now you're just funkling and hedging and trying to dodge responsibility. But don't worry. It's never advice that I ask people for. I just try to discover their opinion. As you say, it is my money, and not yours. I don't mind admitting that I'm always in a terrible funk of losing it. It is because I'm convinced by your opinion that we'll hold our own against even the Link, that I'm willing to sit tight. I've got your opinion, and I believe we ought to go on, just as though they are never going to exist. Of course, we'll do naughty little things now and again—like ringing up and asking the price of that land to-morrow so that they'll buy at once; and putting up that sign a few yards beyond theirs—just because of the poetry of it. But we won't become conscious fighting men. We'll try to go on with the live-and-let-live principle, till we see it breaking down."

"It won't break down," said Hales. "At least, not our part of it won't. I don't know about the 'sales'; or how much that side of it is worth."

"It's worth a lot," said Ingle.

Hales looked uneasy. "Perhaps——" he said thoughtfully; "now I come to think of it, perhaps I have been a bit on the rough side with Mr. Harrison at times. You won't be wanting him to pack up and leave us if they try to get him away, just because he's got a grudge against me for having done him down, off and on. I'd best have a word with him some time soon and straighten things up so as to make things easy and pleasant."

Ingle laughed. "Don't you bother about that, Hales," he said. "Mr. Harrison would not leave us. He hates only one thing, and that he hates with all his being. It is what he calls musically, 'The Selling Syndicate'. This monster, so far as I have been able to isolate it and identify it, is any organisation at all, any fluke, or even any individual other than Mr. Albert B. Harrison himself that ever 'handles a deal' or sells a 'motor-car'—even, I think, uses the term 'motor-cars'. It is enough for Mr. Harrison that the 'Link'



people have remote connections in Great Portland Street — 'The Street' one and only and unmistakable; 'G.P.' — the street of perdition. You would think that the selling of motor-cars was an utterly illicit trade; but, perhaps you have never heard him talk of G.P.?"

"No," said Hales. "I can't say I have. Where he gets me is when he says things like 'All she wants is a dab with your paint-brush' of a job that takes five days in the paint-shop; and he ought to know by now that brushes aren't used for painting any more. But I've often worried afterwards over certain things I've said to him, and I hope you're right in saying he hasn't any grudge."

"I'm sure I am," said Ingle. "At the moment he happens to be rather pleased with you. On the strength of your having borrowed Mrs. Hudson's car for him yesterday, he's booked an order for a Quail; and we haven't had to take in anything for it either. Unfortunately it won't mean a life-long customer, because the man is going to take it out to Malaya. But perhaps he'll recommend us to a clubman in Singapore."

Hales recognised the pulling of his leg. He wondered, even, if the Governor knew about the Quail and was trying to draw him. So he wondered more whether he ought to say quite lightly that the borrowed car had not been Mrs. Hudson's. But he said instead: "Ah" . . . and let it go at that.

He had got as far as the door, relieved that Ingle, too, was willing to carry the matter no further, when he was suddenly recalled with: "Oh, Hales; I'd almost forgotten. I don't think I'm really a fusser, you know. But that damned girder has been worrying me ever since those beggars slung it up there, and left it."

"You mean the new floor one? Why, what's wrong with it, sir?"

"Wrong with it!" said Ingle. "Why, man, the thing must weigh ten tons, and they've just *left* it there. I don't believe there's even a bit of seccotine holding it."

"It's *four* tons," said Hales.

"Well, four tons, then. That's as good as ten. Four hundredweight would be ample, if it came down suddenly with a wallop, *on* something."

"It's not likely to come down," said Hales.

"No," said Ingle. "When I saw it lying on the floor I



didn't think it was likely to go up. But there it is. What's holding it?"

"Nothing's exactly holding it," said Hales. "I mean, nothing but the weight. Four tons."

"I suppose they'll fix it first thing to-morrow?"

"I doubt it," said Hales. "They're more likely to get the others into position first before they start bolting them. There are three more to go. And they may rivet them, instead of bolting, which will be a longer job."

"And in the meantime they're to stay—floating on air."

"It's pretty well supported," Hales reassured him. "You see, it can't move longways. One end is against the wall, let into one of the stanchions. The other is on a nib against the pillar supporting the present floor."

"I daresay. But I had a look at it yesterday from upstairs, and honestly I was afraid to touch it. I believe I could have pushed it down with my foot."

Hales smiled. "You couldn't, sir," he said. "You couldn't knock it off with a sled. The only way it could be got off is with a hand-spike of some kind; I daresay a decent tyre-lever would be man enough for the job, properly handled. You'd have to wangle the end in between the end of the girder and the pillar, and lever it, sideways, off the nib. Yes, it probably could be done—Four tons over forty feet. . . . Two-inch nib . . . forty-foot radius . . . six-inch base . . . Yes, a tyre-lever might tackle it. I could do it with a decent tyre-lever. But you may be sure those chaps know what they're up to. They know no one is likely to *try* to shove it off; and they know it can't be blown off, or shaken off, or pushed off by mice. I've seen them assemble the framework of half a town hall with no more than a dozen bolts holding it together, and none of them more than finger-tight."

Ingle yawned. "I'll take your word for it," he said. "But I'm glad you're sitting under it and not I. Good night, Hales."

"Good night, sir."

As soon as he had reached his cubicle Hales declared himself suddenly to be damned. The Governor, he judged, would still be where he had left him—at his desk. So he immediately took off the receiver of his telephone and buzzed.

"Sorry, sir," he said. "But I thought it best to call you



at once, before you'd settled down. I quite forgot to ask you anything about that job in Coventry. Do I start to-morrow? And when shall I come up for particulars?"

"Oh, that," said Ingle. "I had forgotten it, too, for the moment. No. You needn't go to-morrow. I don't want to press it on them, and one of the men is going to be in London this week. I'll let him come and see me here before we carry it any further. Good night, Hales."

"Good night, sir."

## CHAPTER XVII

HE took off his cap and placed it on the desk in front of him. The movement of his shoulders also indicated that what the Governor had said about Coventry was of no great consequence, but was a relief rather than otherwise. Going off to Coventry would, after all, mean a "turning out", and Hales was no great hand at turning out. A real "treat" would have been a different matter; for he had always been able to deal with treats adequately enough. He could not remember a holiday that he had not enjoyed. Treats—holidays of one full day, or three or fourteen, were a thing apart; but they were now something quite remote. In the old days with Maggie—and in the older days without her—you made calculations and nominated an exact sum of money. You set this sum aside; and then, with a feeling of something very near to mischief, you add a bit to it. You bought your return ticket (or tickets) and forthwith entered a new and attractive world. Always it had been a world full of company. Surprisingly enough (surprisingly, now, to himself also) Hales had always spoken this world's language with ease and adequate fluency. With money that had, *ex hypothesi*, to be spent at a given rate, he was no dull stick. In a bar, with some detail of cap or shoes or socks—or indeed of his complete suit—proclaiming him to be a man on holiday, he had always been as good as the next man. On the beach or the pier he had been up to all the tricks of the game: the glances, the nods and head-shakes, the beckonings with lips and eyebrows, the ancient gag—"well, quite a stranger" . . . "You *have* grown a big girl since last Christmas. . . ." he had known and practised them all. Thereafter ice-creams and the jolli-



nesses that classed themselves in reverie as "one thing and another." . . . No, quite definitely, Hales had missed very little on holidays. Maggie herself was, in a sense, loot from the Clacton beach when he had had a temporary but good job in a motor lawn-mower factory, whose obvious holiday-ground was Clacton. Only in a sense was she loot. It had been a rare job getting her away from her parents and their umbrellas and lemonade-bottles for the first talk. Most skilfully had they designed the joke of his decorous introduction to herself and the dozing old people by a gawkish fellow named Lennie Stubbs, who seemed to stand well with them, and whom adoration of Maggie made capable of the glibbest and most convincing lies; of sitting for hours on end in moonlight or scorching sun, looking out to sea while Hales and Maggie reclined in some shaded nook or whispered their love under the stars. . . . Solemnly the three good friends would return to the smiling parents for lunch or tea or supper. If there was a kettle of water to be fetched from the tap half a mile away it was Lennie who always stumped off to fetch it. At night, when Maggie had been finally surrendered to parents and domesticity in their lodgings, and the two men were men, in a bar, Lennie would accept a first drink with some embarrassment, declining a second with, "No. It's quite all right, o' man. Don't you worry about me . . ." suggesting that recompense for his inestimable services was already as complete as it was mysterious. . . .

It was fitting that this same Lennie Stubbs should have been best man at Hales's wedding. Fitting also, it seemed, that he should have passed quietly out during the Great War, by reason of a kick on the head from a mule while his battery was resting.

Maggie had always been a great one for treats and holidays as she was for the solid and routine business of wifehood. After the wedding, holidays had lacked beach-combing with any eye to the chance of loot; but this was of no consequence, since Maggie unfailingly, by a metamorphosis of spirit and possibly her different clothes, herself became as strange and as fresh as newly won loot. . . . Yes, they had known how to deal with "treats", those two; and they had had their share of them—barring the hollow years of unemployment—until the sudden striking down of Maggie had landed them all where they did not know any longer



where they were. That suggested that the essential beauty of a "treat" was that you did know exactly where you were: you had so much money to spend, and so much time in which to spend it. Everyone fit; good appetites to be satisfied; a return ticket. . . .

And so, his having promised his sister a "treat" was a mockery; for they did not, either of them, know where they were. He had felt, when telling her of it, that it might be possible to conjure up an illusion of the old feeling; but he saw now that the illusion would not come. There seemed to be very little point in the suggestion of taking his sister to Coventry. Without her a big non-stop drink would no doubt have been possible; but even that was not attractive. Drinking on the grand scale—real drinking, of spirit which you drank and drank and drank till you could drink no more by reason of your whole being's ultimate revulsion from it—such drinking, which was the only kind of drinking worth two hoots, required a fairly buoyant approach, with a mind pretty much at ease.

And there was Maggie. Seeing her that afternoon presented a puzzle even darker than the torment of the last few months. The peace of her, and her ease, had been not her own, but remote from her and detached. She herself was waiting for a reopening of the question, as he must wait for it, with no possibility of evasion. There was the business, too, of Mrs. Hudson leaving her car lying about in the floodlight of a place of famed gaiety, for any Tom, Dick or Harry to see; and Kempthorne calmly being driven out to it. By the merest fluke it was not young Ginger who had taken him and seen, greatly to his entertainment, the Quail. It could quite well, at another time of day, have been Winter himself. Then there was the Governor's jocularities, which meant something, though only God knew what; for the Governor would have as funny ideas about Mrs. Hudson and her husband and Kempthorne as he had about everything else.

Somehow, in this matter, he could not altogether trust the Governor. He had said: "O Phyllida . . . Phyllida . . . Phyllida . . ." That was the way in which men sometimes sneered.

Yet it was incredible that it should have been a sneer—a man like the Governor sneering at one like Mrs. Hudson. Incredible! But he had been at the same school



as Hudson, who had come sneaking back to spy and prowl; and that, also, ought to have been incredible. But it was true. And there you were. . . .

He put on his cap, lighted a cigarette and stepped briskly from his haunted, restless solitude to the shop.

It was now the hour of over-lap between the "afternoon" shift and the night-shift proper; the one hour in every twenty-four when some twenty odd hours of work could be squandered by the one shift tumbling over the other or "getting underfoot". Properly run, the system was a sound one, and Hales was generally able to get something quite substantial out of the last lap of the hearties he shared with Winter and the first of his own, uninterrupted crew.

One incidental point of the scheme was that both shifts got a square meal that was also hot at an hour when homes would have merely scratched together things like pickles and cheese, odd bits of cold meat and pudding and tea.

The chief factor with which Hales had had to contend in this hour was the disinclination on the part of the incomers to spend the time in getting themselves oiled and dirtied-up before supper. But he turned this very frailty to some account by using it as a force behind his rule that the first thing to be done to any job was to get it properly *clean*. What was the first thing a surgeon did when he was about to operate on a head? He got the hair cut or shaved away, so that he could see what he was at. So with a job; it was a waste of time poking about in grease and mud, not knowing the difference between a nut and a stud or a rivet. Cleaning down, moreover, was a boy's best introduction to a job. Therefore (theoretically) when a mechanic stepped up to a job, it was as dazzlingly ready for him as a head on a surgeon's table, so that a wipe on the hank of cotton-waste was all he should require before going in to supper—even if the supper had been at the Savoy.

The business of "handing-over" was not so easily disposed of. It had its strict formalities, the formalities being the invention of Hales himself. With the job-sheet, and bearing the same progressive number, was the card which went ultimately into the file which he himself kept on file. On this card were the initials of every man who had contributed to the job, against the detail which had been his contribution. If, therefore, a man knocking off at twelve



could leave the initialling for something he had completed or scamped, to his successor—so much the better for himself and the worse for the successor if anything went wrong, and there was music to be faced later. But there were, generally, parleying and appeals: "Mr. 'Ales . . . Please . . . Gent here wants to 'ave a word with you." Or: "There's a young engineer here wants a consultation," or: "Engineer here made a discovery. Come on, Sammy, speak up. Brain-waves forward!" They were cheery enough when it was getting on for twelve o'clock and supper; and their cheeriness and good humour seldom got away with anything; for there was some entertainment to be looked for when jobs came back again after two, or five, or ten thousand miles, when Hales dug the old card out of his cabinet and brought it into the shop to see who had done what, and to see how each detail had stood up to the road and, generally, the cruelty of the owner.

Disputes of the fiercer sort were usually marked by Ginger crooning, in whatever position the moment happened to find him, "Can't you talk it over before you say you're through?" This now familiar sound usually meant that things had got beyond pleasantries and that Hales went down the shop in a manner grim and serious. "Thick ear!" he would say; "I'll look after all the thick ears that wants doing. And don't you forget it, either of you. Can't you *do* a thing instead of standing over it and arguing like a couple of bloody washerwomen, or kids? What's up?"—or, "So it's you again young Carberry, is it? I might have known. It's a sheeny 'manager' you want, my lad, to quiet you down. But so long as you are here among us peaceful chaps, there's lots for you to do, instead of talking of thick ears and smashed faces. You come along with me . . ." and he would lead the loutish Carberry to something really entertaining—like tapping the end of a broken back axle for the screwing in of a bolt as the only way of withdrawing it from the casing; or that most cursed of all human labours—spring-leaves. That would put "paid" to young Carberry for the time being; and Ginger would croon something else which would become, in time, a chanty, with his neighbours joining in.

"I'd best pop my eyes over those brakes first thing," Ginger said to-night. Hales smiled at him. "That's right, Ginger. Do. That won't get your hands dirty, and it'll take



you just till supper-time. And mind, that's a special job, lad. More special than most."

They went to Kempthorne's car to push it to the hydraulic jack.

"Oh, Mr. Winter was creating a bit over that job, Mr. 'Ales." This came from the boy who was polishing the car next to it.

"Creating, sonny?" said Hales, "to *you*?"

"Well," the boy said, "just after you brought her in from trial. It was about the job-sheet. He wondered how it came to be the only one in the place without a name on it."

"Oh," said Hales, "he did, did he? Afraid it might get mixed up with one of the others, I suppose?"

The boy smiled. For it was seldom that Hales rose so easily to any fly, however neatly cast.

"I told him I could put a mark on it for him," said the boy, instead of letting well alone.

"Oh, you did?" said Hales. "And if there's a mark on your behind, I shouldn't be surprised. And if there isn't, there damn soon will be, unless you learn to keep your mouth shut a bit better. You keep an eye on him, Ginger, while you're on those brakes. And if there's any more fun from him——"

He went off, for he saw a group of three at the far end of the shop; and a group meant a hang-up, notwithstanding that one of the heads among the three was the glistening pate of Curly.

Said Ginger the adept to the neophyte: "Gertie, you keep that line of back-chat for your last rose of summer—the gent known as Mr. Winter. Anyone but a cocky, bloody young idiot like you would see that poor old Hale-and-Hearty has had the guts worried out of him till he's next door to dippy. A year ago he'd have had the heart in him to kick your backside through that windscreen for such a bit of sauce. Now he lets it go—and calls you 'Sonny'. 'Sonny'—I'd give you 'Sonny'! No. Just you leave him alone till I tell you different. And a bit more muck on you won't make much odds to the stink of you either way. So just get under here and shove the rear wheels round while I set the hand-brake. Tell me the notch before the one that locks 'em."





Sunday night in the shop was always a good and a busy one.

There were now no less than five customers—manufacturers of brushes and of corsets, a wholesale stationer, a distributor of tyres and a provision merchant—who agreed that it might be a paying proposition for them to have their travellers' cars serviced weekly, ready for Monday morning. They had started with their travellers of the West only; but now even those who would go, later in the day (and for the rest of the week), Northwards, South and East, left their cars at the "Never-Sleep", and came out by bus and train to fetch them. It was convenient; for they all had conferences at headquarters on Monday mornings, and all their registered offices were west of Shepherd's Bush.

Then there were the golfers who could not surrender their cars before dark on Sunday nights; and they invariably wanted them ready on Monday evening because it was convenient to pick them up on the way home from the City.

The work went more easily on these Sunday nights, for the cars of the eighteen or twenty travellers on the regular list had achieved, each one, adoption by one individual or another among the men. They were "Ginger's jobs" and "Sammy's" and "Charlie's" and "Curly's". Some of them were the recognised property of the morning and the afternoon shifts; and even the boys recognised each other's particular rights as to washing, polishing and tyre-pressures.

Sunday nights were, perhaps, the fullest house. It took the night-shift every minute of its time, hard going, with Hales on the move from job to job and bench to bench, to have things done in such a way that the day lot would have no occasion to go butting in with their initials on half-filled-in cards, their paw-marks on paint-work and upholstery.

Which made it all the more fishy for Winter to have pushed forward a job that could, so far as things were admitted and above-board, have waited over the week-end till Monday night.

It may have been just his jealousy; striving to keep the beloved Mr. Hudson's job under his own umbrella. It may have been that, and nothing more.

But it may not. . . .



In the morning Hales could think of no pretext for hanging about in order to be there when Kempthorne came. So he hurried home just before Winter's arrival at seven.

## CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN he came back to the cubicle in the evening Winter asked him most amiably, "Any news, mate?"

"News?" said Hales. "Oh . . . ah . . . you mean the wife. No. Not yet. Thanks all the same. I'm not really expecting any through yet awhile. I'll be calling them up a bit later, maybe."

Winter seemed relieved at finding that the topic whereon he must offer nought but sympathy was closed; for he had a topic of his own ready.

"Funny thing about that job you took out to test yesterday," he said.

"If it's the name on the job-sheet that's still biting you," said Hales, "don't let it worry you any more. I'll get it filled in—the girls in the office probably got it when he paid. I suppose the owner did come to collect this morning?"

"Oh yes. He came all right," said Winter; and he positively twinkled. "About ten. Off the train he remarked; but didn't say what train got him here at that time—when everything that I happen to know of is the local stuff, from places where toffs don't usually go for week-ends."

"Still," said Hales, "the Railway Company might go and run a train from somewhere without telling you about it."

Winter felt he could afford to ignore this. "He asked after you, too," he continued, "at least, he didn't exactly ask after you. He said he supposed you wouldn't be about. I said no; quite right; you were off duty."

"Well, let's have the job-sheet, and I'll get it filled in and put away," said Hales. It was funny that Kempthorne should have asked about him and then said no more. Nothing about ringing up even. . . . He must be setting more store on passing unnoticed, and unconnected with anything in particular, than he had admitted. Yet it was only in the Garage that he wanted to be unnoticed, for he had made no bones about declaring himself to Doctor Thompson and young Carruthers at the hospital.

"But it is filled in," said Winter. "So it's you that



needn't worry any more. I filled it in myself. I just asked him his name, and he told me. With such a pleasant smile."

"Then I don't see what you find so funny," said Hales, as disgusted with himself for rising to this fellow's flies as he had been the night before, with that saucy youngster in the workshop.

"I find the name itself funny," said Winter, and he was so genuinely amused that Hales wondered if the name Kempthorne could be made funny—if one of the more ingenuous wits behind the great steel doors of the "shop" could get anything brightly smutty out of it. The one possibility that did occur to his mind was too far-fetched to be an easy explanation of Winter's jocularitv: so he dismissed it.

Winter, meanwhile, had lifted back the top of his end of the desk and taken out the job-sheet.. The mere contact of his hand with it set him chuckling; and he pushed the sheet towards his colleague.

Hales read: "Owner's name, SMITH. Address, LONDON."

Winter said: "Can you beat it?"

Hales said quietly: "I haven't tried. And I'm not going to, thank you." He was immensely dignified and quite cool. He slowly opened his own end of the desk and slipped the sheet in. "I'll have the card, too, unless you've filed it," he said. But Winter only laughed.

Well, let him laugh, thought Hales—laugh his bloody head off.

He hadn't got the name, after all; and he, Hales, had not been such a fool for keeping it from him. It was what Kempthorne himself had done glibly by offering "Smith".

"And the joke is," Winter went on, "that I've spelt it wrong. It's one of them posh, fancy Smiths. I ought to have spelt it with a capital K. 'W.B.K.' was the letters on his suit-case, plain as the nose on your face; and he's not the sort who'd have to borrow a suit-case every time he wanted a week-end off. Not like the wife's young sister had to do, for her first visits to the uncle in Bournemouth."

The two looked at each other for a few moments. Hales said: "Funny, aren't you?" and turned to leave the cubicle for the shop.

Winter, all laughter now gone from him, said: "It's your ruddy *innocence* that gets me. Why can't you admit things, man? Say things aren't what they seem. Allow that this high monkey-monk isn't any better than he ought to be.



whoever he is, God blast him. Why shouldn't he have a night or two off from his missis if he wants it—and say his name is Smith when it's Kenrick—or anything else spelt with a K?. Who are you to be so damned sanctimonious that butter wouldn't melt in your mouth; and always the same—pretending God knows what. And why . . .”

Winter was speaking with an intensity that was uncanny and disconcerting, like the curious rigidity a serpent can suddenly display.

“Here——” said Hales. He knew that the fellow was telling the most fantastic lies, accusing him of innocence and sanctimoniousness. He, Hales, had never denied a single one of the things which Winter asserted. He was denying nothing now. Innocent indeed! Sanctimonious. . . . But what could he say to him?

Nothing. They spoke different languages.

“You'll get an eye-opener some day,” Winter said; and he seemed to have become weary.

“Perhaps I don't need one as badly as you think.” Hales said this only because he could not absolutely lie down under a charge of qualities that amounted, paraphrased in any language other than Winter's to idiocy.

“Then some day perhaps you'll admit that you do.” Winter's weariness amounted to resignation. Hales's only thought was that he could go to hell.

The telephone rang—not the buzz from the Governor or the “shop” or the petrol-pump, but the bell of outside calls. Winter was nearest the instrument and stretched out his hand for it. But Hales jumped forward and grabbed it. They were like urchins grabbing for a coin. “Here—you——” said Hales; “you—are not on duty now. It's mine.”

Winter surrendered and shrugged his shoulders. Hales spoke the formula quite calmly, “‘Never-Sleep' here. Night duty speaking.” He knew that there was only one word that he must not utter; and yet, so far had his thoughts gone from Winter in a few seconds of waiting in silence, that he blurted out when he heard the voice for which some nurse or secretary had asked him to wait, “Good evening, Mr. Kempthorne. Yes, sir, Hales speaking . . .”

Winter slouched away, snickering—“S for Kempthorne, K for Smith. W. B. Smith,” but Hales put his hand over the telephone and called after him, “Here! Winter—hold



on. Stop a minute. Wait a bit, can't you? . . ." Into the telephone again he said, "Sorry, sir. Interruption . . . All clear now." Then for several minutes he listened; nodding, saying little except, dully "Yes." "Very good." "Thank you, sir." "Not for some time now." "That—that will be all right." "Don't worry about that, sir. I'll see to it . . . Good night, sir. And thank you."

Kempthorne had said—"Oh, and by the way, Hales, I thought it better to leave a spoof name at your place this morning. I didn't explain to the other chap who was on duty. Not worth it; but I don't like my movements known. Wouldn't get much time off if I did—really to myself, you know. And I've got to, sometimes. And I very particularly want this time kept dark. I don't mind Dr. Thompson's knowing—professionally; and you. I think you understand. I can trust you . . ."

Something, apparently, *had* gone wrong; for he had treated the matter fairly casually two days ago, and he was anything but casual now.

Winter was smoking a cigarette, strolling up and down under the new girder.

"You wanted me, chief," he said, smiling; for good humour seemed to have returned to him.

"It's like this, old man," Hales said; the "old man" came hard, but it had to come; he had to be abject because of the fool he had made of himself. "It's like this. Mr. Kempthorne's one of the highest-up cancer specialists in London. In the world, so Doctor Thompson and the young chap at the hospital say. He's just got to go about calling himself Smith or some other name, or he'd never get an hour off. His patients wouldn't let him. See? He rubbed it in again to-night, and I told him he could trust—*us*."

Winter said, "H'm . . . I don't see that it can matter such a hell of a lot now—after he's got back to his precious patients. Do you? . . . Sorry, old son. Sorry. I can see that it was bad news he had for you. If you'd only told me what you knew, at the start, I wouldn't of—it is bad news, isn't it?"

He was gentle now in his nosing after bad news.

"No," said Hales. "It was fine news. Couldn't be better, thanks. I'm going in yonder." He indicated the shop, and switched the telephone over. "Good night."

But he went in only to tell Hargreaves that he was going



up to see the Governor. When he came back Winter was gone.

Into the Governor's telephone he said, "I know it's just about your dinner-time, sir; but if you could spare me a few minutes, I've just heard from Mr. Kempthorne about my wife. It's bad. I don't know what—thank you, sir. . . ." He hung up the receiver and found the lower showroom key on his bunch and went upstairs.

In the lift he wondered what he was going for—putting the Governor's dinner back for nothing. For what could the Governor do? What could anyone do?"

Life, as soon as you were outside the workshop, was like Winter's talk; a spate of snarls and jibes, disconnected and generally pointless, yet remotely coherent. There was nothing to stem it, or even divert it. All you could do was to swallow something down; to keep on swallowing it, believing that the sensation of choking was no more than a sensation.

"It's pretty bad news, sir," he said to Ingle.

Ingle said, "I'll get you a drink." He poured a whisky. "We'll leave out the formality of soda, Hales. Lap it up like a Scotsman."

Hales drank. The liquor seared its way from his throat to his stomach, and with the gentle fume that rose to his palate there was a soft caress somewhere behind his eyes.

"It's bad, or I wouldn't of bothered you just at your dinner-time," he said thoughtfully.

"You don't bother me, and it isn't my dinner-time," said Ingle. "And I'm going to talk to you like a father. You've made a silly mess of yourself, and you're going on making a worse one. This illness of your wife's has taken the stuffing out of you, and started you sneaking up to things, instead of waiting for them to come to you. Look at the way you've done nothing but apologise to me for the last two minutes. 'Bothering me . . .' 'Dinner-time . . .' Damn it, man! I said I'd be glad to see you; isn't that good enough? I could have said, 'come at nine', if I'd preferred to eat my dinner first. You've just forgotten how to mind your own business. That is most of your trouble. It's my business whether I put off my dinner for a few minutes, not yours. Do, for God's sake, get hold of that. In little things, I mean. It'll save you half the bother you're finding. See what I mean?"



The question was put so gently that Hales felt he did see it. He smiled and took another gulp of whisky.

"Just as a small example," Ingle went on, "I happened to run into Mrs. Hudson to-day, at lunch in town, and thanked her for lending us the Quail on Saturday. No—you needn't tell me, I *know*. I can see right through you. You didn't want to bother her . . . just at her breakfast-time . . . or God knows what other solicitude. But don't you see—can't you see—that whether she's bothered, or not, is *her* business?"

"But whether I'm to be the one to do the bothering is my business, isn't it?" It was seldom that Hales could feel so warmly that he had scored in conversation.

Ingle smiled. "Up to a point, I suppose, yes," he said. "There's something in that. But in this particular instance it wasn't your business at all. It was mine. You see, I had a very special reason for wanting you to ask for Mrs. Hudson's Quail, and not just any old Quail."

"I made sure that it was a good one we got," said Hales. "I got it myself. Just as good as Mrs. Hudson's; and a later model."

"I daresay," said Ingle. "But not Mrs. Hudson's."

"I'm sorry, sir." Hales felt that this was lame. He finished his drink and set down the glass.

"That sort of thing just won't wash," Ingle went on. "It wears you out. You can like people up to the point of loving them; but that is not the way to do it. It is generally thought to be the way—but it's quite wrong—trying to project yourself up to some fantastic point where you're responsible for digesting their food and having their chilblains. I—I used the word love in its widest sense; but it's a wide term and it applies. I know you think very highly of Mrs. Hudson."

This was a proud moment for Hales. He had forgotten the reason that had brought him, tottering through the dusky showroom and leaning against the lift-side, to collapse into the presence of the Governor.

He looked at the Governor and smiled.

"Well," said the Governor, also smiling, "as a matter of fact, I think highly of her too. And take it from me, Hales, when you feel like that about people—whatever the degree of it—the best thing you can do—in fact the only thing you can do—is to let them go on in their own way, to their own



objects. I've thought about this a great deal. You can watch them; but you must leave them alone."

It was either that glow from the whisky's aroma, still gently lingering behind the eye-sockets of Hales, that illumined wits that had been dull; or else it was that Ingle quite obviously asked for it. However, Hales smiled and said, "Would ringing her up to ask for her car have been leaving her alone?"

Ingle at first only said, "H'm." Then he said, "Yes. As a matter of fact, I think it would." He jerked away from his thought. "That's that, anyway. I only wanted you to see my point. And I think you do."

But there was more in this, thought Hales, than met the eye. What it was, he had not the remotest idea; but it was disturbing. The Governor either knew something or was trying to find something out—and that talk of minding your own business was all very well. The Governor must have some reason . . . Sheer inspiration visited him once more. Very calmly and with Latin glibness he set forth an elaborate lie. "My real reason for not ringing up, sir, was Mr. Hudson. I thought the chance was that he would come to the phone. I couldn't very well have choked him off and said it was *Mrs.* Hudson I wanted to speak to. I'd have had to tell him what I was wanting; and I think he'd have taken it as a bit of sauce—borrowing his wife's car like that. He never did seem to cotton on to me very much."

This succeeded, apparently, as a lie; but Ingle did not seem to be deeply interested. He shrugged his shoulders. "As it happens," he said, "Mr. Hudson was away."

"As it happens," Hales retorted with a carelessness of manner that amounted to disrespect, "he was at home."

"Actually it was Edinburgh he went to on Friday," said Ingle. "I dined with them on Tuesday, and he mentioned that he was going."

"I don't know about Friday" said Hales, "—or even Saturday. But on Sunday he was at home."

"And I'd like to know," said Ingle slowly and thoughtfully, frowning, "what the hell he was doing at home?"

"Sitting at the end of his garden," said Hales, "reading a newspaper."

Ingle strolled about the room for about a minute. Then he said, "I suppose you're sure of this?"

"I saw him."



"You didn't, by any chance, see Mrs. Hudson, too?"

"She wasn't with him," said Hales. He added—"not at the time. I just happened to be passing the house."

"Well"—said Ingle—"now that I've given you your scolding, let's get down to this business of yours."

The Governor's sympathy was perfect: his willingness to help was obviously complete, but Hales felt that he had been a fool to come bundling in there with his burden. The Governor couldn't help with it, for all his goodwill. The goodwill was itself a pleasant enough thing; but he could have had that—he had, in fact, had it without exhibiting his perplexity and his utter woe.

Particularly he had had it when the Governor had been "spreading himself", laying down the law about the proper way to love people, speaking of Mrs. Hudson; smiling again, as he had smiled the day before in mumbling—"O—Phyllida, Phyllida, Phyllida——" thinking that Hales would not pay any attention to him.

But he came back to the thing that had driven him upstairs to seek that fellowship and goodwill; the thing that had again dulled his wits and frozen the caress that had touched his brain, and made ashes of the aroma that the harshly-swallowed whisky had distilled upon his palate.

"Six weeks," he said. "They won't know for about six weeks. Well, I suppose six weeks—is six weeks and there's no more to be said about it."

He was ready to go back now; to the cubicle, and then the shop.

"What was it you expected?" Ingle asked gently. "Kempthorne's method is a slow one."

"That's just it," said Hales. "She could have an operation now; and done with it. It might kill her or it mightn't. This treatment—she might die during the treatment, Mr. Kempthorne said. She might die—or she mightn't—for six weeks. If she doesn't die in the six weeks, the treatment might have cured her; or it mightn't. If it doesn't she can still have the operation. One thing Mr. Kempthorne did tell me though—this treatment isn't all beer and skittles, like I thought it was. It's true it isn't an operation. It's just needles or tubes or something stuck in; there's no knifing to speak of. Instead of that there's a hell's own fight. Every minute it is a fight—the cancer against the stuff. And the cancer was bad enough when it was having



a walk-over, without anything to get in its way and make a fight of it."

"Hales," Ingle said, "you—you're too picturesque, you know; in your thinking and in your talk. With your talk you lash yourself up into a sort of frenzy——"

"Oh, I know talking is no use," he answered sullenly, and began to fumble at the half of his folded cap that stuck out of his pocket.

"But that's where you're wrong," said Ingle. "Talk is of some use. It's all we've got, anyway. But just stop and see what is happening. You yourself are fit and conscious. With your fitness and consciousness you're trying to imagine—and you've been doing it for weeks—how terrible the pain must be. Well, it would be as terrible as you imagine if there was that consciousness—your own keen, healthy sensitiveness—to respond to it. But there isn't, Hales. A sick person is weak; and a weak person is only *half there*——"

"Tell me that!" snorted Hales; "——blasted guff! And they've all tried it on, one time or another! Dr. Thompson, young Carruthers at the hospital, my sister—and even Mr. Kempthorne. Only *half there*. . . . And what about the other half? What does it do?" He paused, challenging Ingle with a staring insolence that made it clear to the Governor that he was about to be floored utterly in his attempt to offer specious argument to the fellow.

"I'll tell you what it does," said Hales. With his left thumb, which ancient and forgotten hammer-blows had modelled to the shape of a mushroom, he indicated a spot on the arm of his chair. "It just sits there," he said. "On one side. Quite close. And it looks on all the time. It looks on; and it grins at what it sees the other half doing. Yes, grins, I tell you. *Grins*. . . ." He drew his lips apart from his clenched teeth. His eyes widened their lids away as he protruded them in an unseeing stare at Ingle; and Ingle did not like the look of the fellow. It fidgeted him.

Hales relaxed his contortion. "Like a skull," he mumbled. "A skull with only the eyes left alive in it. . . . Now you've *got* it. So don't try telling me any more of that stuff—about being only *half there*."

"Very well," said Ingle. "I won't. But there is such a thing as morphia, you know."

"Yes, thank you!" said Hales. "And I know all about



that too. It turns the grin into a sickly smile for a bit. Or it's like a knock over the head, and breathing sounds all full of bubbles like a chap with a bayonet in his lungs."

Ingle laid his hand on Hales's shoulder. "It seems that there's no pleasing some people," he said. And Hales, proving that some Scotsmen have a sense of humour, smiled too.

"Another small drink for you," Ingle said, taking his glass and moving towards the sideboard. "And I'll have one with you. I feel there is something more to be said."

"I'll have some soda this time, sir, please," said Hales. Quite definitely he was a little thirsty.

"The fact of the whole matter is," Ingle said, when he had handed Hales his glass and sat down, "that you would prefer your wife to die. I say that only because half the bother in life is perplexity. You're better if you see things squarely—and just admit them."

"But I *can't* just admit it!" said Hales. "Every time I see her I've got to deny it. Even when I'm not seeing her I've got to pretend. If she were to think, for two minutes, that I was sick of it and wouldn't give two hoots if she never came back, that would be another poke in the eye for her. And what's the good of that?"

"I think you put it a little crudely," said Ingle. "If she thought that you couldn't bear to inflict any further torture on her for your own selfish ends——"

"Ah"—said Hales. "If . . . if women ever thought that way . . . You don't know women, sir. Even my sister, and a more sensible woman never lived—— No, I've got to pretend I don't want her to die. There's nothing to be done."

The fact was that Hales had arrived, once more, at the very end of his resources for thinking about this thing. By the leather strap that tethered it, he drew his watch out of his waistcoat pocket. Its own massive case was protected by a shell of yellowing celluloid with a glazed front: it served the immediate purpose of setting him promptly upon his feet, convincing him that his absence from the shop was leaving therein a vacuum.

"Lord!" he said. "It's nearly a half after eight."

"Why not tell Kempthorne you'd prefer them to operate?" Ingle said. "I believe I would, in your place. And not because of what I said a minute ago about—her



dying. But on quite general grounds. You see, about the best man available would do the operation. The chances would be good. I'd say as good as old Kemmie can offer from his treatment. It's still in a fairly experimental stage, that treatment of his. Hit and miss—miss and hit—and even Kemmie hasn't the foggiest notion why, most of the time. I suppose it was really to get your instructions that he rang up."

"I suppose it was," said Hales.

"And you told him?"

"I told him to do what was best," said Hales. "What else could I tell him? I couldn't get out of it any other way."

It looked, for a moment, as though he might make that embarrassing face again, with his lips tugged back to nothing, and his teeth and eyes jabbed out. But he only fidgeted, and looked at his watch again and got his cap completely out of his pocket and said, from ancient habit, "Will that be all then, sir?"

"Yes," said Ingle. "But I'll have a talk to Mr. Kempthorne myself."

"Thank you, sir," said Hales. "Good night then."

That was something—the Governor's speaking to Kempthorne. To seek that very thing was the sole reason for his having gone upstairs at all, instead of continuing to sit at his desk, as he was again sitting now for a few minutes, before going into the shop. It was as well, he thought, to give one more cigarette a chance against the whisky in his breath before talking, cheek by jowl, with subordinates after coming from the Governor's . . .

And the way certain impudent and idiotic ones among them said that the Governor never did anything that mattered a damn. Hales knew better, however. He knew that when the Governor did things they did matter. For some particular reason, too, the Governor did things which other men would not do. The Garage itself was a case in point. He, Hales, had spoken of that bit of waste land going begging after the war, to at least fifty other men before he had spoken of it to Ingle. Some of them were already in the motor trade. Two of them had probably had as many thousands of pounds as Ingle had hundreds. Some of them had not even listened. Some had listened and not



given it a further thought. Some had thought for months, and done nothing. The Governor—who had known not one end of a car from the other, had listened—for perhaps an hour. For a day and a half thereafter he had thought. In ten days a petrol-pump was in position. In a fortnight Hales had a lathe, a vice and an electric drill in an army hut, and the “Never-Sleep” Garage was in the telephone directory. In two months they had bought seven second-hand cars and sold five of them . . .

That was the thing about the Governor: he could *see*. Even when you thought a thing was invisible to any other human eye, he saw it . . .

Already he was seeing something about the Hudsons and the week-end; and Hales wished to God he knew what; for then he would have known whether to tell him what he himself knew now with complete certainty—that when Mr. Hudson had been at home Mrs. Hudson and the Quail had been elsewhere. . . .

He gave it up; for although it was the most important thing in the world, it defeated him utterly.

## CHAPTER XIX

It defeated him; but it did not leave him to his defeat as did the other thing—numb and unconscious of it.

His sister had his tea and porridge on the table for him when he got home in the morning. She waited a few moments before saying, “Well?”

He recollected that she, of course, did not know of his talk with Kempthorne; and he was startled at his negligence in making her ask for the news that he ought to have hastened to give her, instead of worrying over those Hudsons, and Kempthorne, and the Quail, and Winter, and the Governor.

“Sorry, Lil,” he said humbly. “But it’s none too good. They can’t do miracles. It’s a long job. And even then it may not act, and we’re back to the operation—where we started from. But——” and he paused, dabbing a spoonful of hot porridge into the bowl of cold milk. “But the Governor’s taken it up now,” and he seemed to smile.

“But what can he do?” asked his sister, “—that the specialist can’t do?”



Hales could not tell her. "It's not exactly *that*," was all he could say; and then, "perhaps he can't do anything—any more than you or I. But—there it is."

What he wanted, Lil decided, as she looked at him, was his day's sleep. She bothered him no further.

The dust-up with Winter had driven clean out of his mind, and his talk with the Governor had kept out of it, the question with which he had approached the Garage the evening before—the question of Mr. Hudson's car. He had been fully occupied by little problems in the shop till midnight, and it was not till about three o'clock in the morning that he noticed that the car was gone. He found the card, to see that it had been collected—by Hudson himself at the unusual hour of eight-thirty on Monday morning.

All this might prove nothing—nothing at all. On the other hand it could easily prove that the finishing of the job before Sunday night was no mere fluke on the part of Winter. And if it was not a fluke, it proved not only that Mr. Hudson's sneaking back home instead of going, as advertised even to the Governor, to Scotland, was a sinister plot; but it proved also that Winter was a party to it.

Damn Winter, was the only clear thought that came, crystallised, out of the stagnant and turgid depths of his brooding. And this was all that he took up to bed with him.

There was, also, the oiliness of the fellow; the way he mouthed his enquiries and solitudes slobbering the simplest questions till even they became, somehow, shameful; and you wanted to turn away from the embarrassment as from a man making a pig of himself over his food and getting into difficulties with it which, to him, were no difficulties at all.

There was nothing to be gained by getting late to the Garage in the hope of Winter's having gone home; for he never was gone. He stayed always, to make a song and dance of his so-called "handing-over"—if he made it about nothing else. Once, after scowling at the fact of Winter's still being there, he had made some evasive apology for his lateness. "Late, ol' man?" Winter had said amiably. "*Are* you late?" He looked at his watch. "Fourteen minutes! Well, if there's going to be no give and take between chaps like us, I should say there isn't any anywhere. I wouldn't call fourteen minutes 'late'.



Not with what I know you must be going through."

So being a little late would do no good.

Punctually at seven, therefore, he said to Winter in the cubicle, "The news is still O.K. She's going on as well as can be expected." That, he thought, would shut him up on that point, and be rid of his oiliness.

Winter closed the blue volume of the telephone directory, which was open on his desk.

"I'd say it *was* O.K., ol' man," he said. "A Harley Street address ought to mean something if anything does nowadays. It just shows, though, what a mug's game it is saying your name's Smith, when your suit-case says W.B.K. The odds are, with a car like his, that he's on the telephone when almost every Tom, Dick and Harry is. And I'd lay two to one that I could have dug him out, even if you hadn't said his name last night. I knew all along what his job is. There was one of those listening-in jiggers in the off-side pocket of the car, those 'Say nine-ty-nine' things."

Hales was looking at two or three job-sheets selected by Winter for the peculiarities and queries they presented.

"I'd have put him down as a sporting sort of parson out for an airing," Winter went on, "if I hadn't happened to see that doctor's gadget."

"He's not a doctor," said Hales, quite amiably. "He's mister. He's a surgeon, and surgeons are very particular about that."

"Yes, but not reverend," said Winter; "that's my point. Though I must say I'd have given him the reverend, even, with his long jaw shaved till you could see your face in it, and his lily-white hands. Reverends *have* been known to pop off now and then, you know, with pyjamas and tooth-brush as Mr. and Mrs. Smith of London. You can't expect wearing a collar the wrong way round to make all that difference in a man's human nature. And then there's 'welfare' to be considered; and rescue work!"

Almost the fellow was droll. Hales admitted it, and if he could have smiled and made some friendly answer, he would have done so. But he could not, and there the matter ended.

But Winter had not finished.

He gave up his playful badinage and took up a more "man-to-man" attitude. "I wish I'd known yesterday what



I know now," he said. "I don't blame you."

"Blame me for what?" It occurred to Hales, as soon as he had said it, that he might have done better by just saying, without too much sarcasm, but just enough, "Ta! I'll be able to get a bit of sleep now, with that off my mind."

"Blame you for Mr. Smith," said Winter. "If I knew a bit of something about a lad of that sort, you wouldn't get it out of me in a hurry—until he forced me to it himself. Most people have got to *pay* for things like Harley Street, or go and be butchered at the infirmary. Pay through the ruddy nose in money. But when you're lucky enough to *know* something——"

That was the moment at which Hales should, for reasons psychological as well as dramatic, have allowed his hand to bunch itself into a sudden knob and alight in the middle of Winter's lugubrious face. Winter would have gone head over heels through the cubicle door on to the cement floor—without, probably, any serious damage to himself.

Hales would have picked him up or knocked him down again, according to his future behaviour; or, according to the skill of Winter in such matters, the knocking-down may have gone the other way. A duel would, in either case, have served the purpose of duels by reducing blood-pressure; and the setting for such a scene was admirable: there was ample room outside the cubicle; the light from the globe overhead was excellent, uninterrupted except for the one sharp, narrow shadow cast by the suspended girder; and there were no spectators to have kept them posturing in combat beyond the requirements of their own private and respective urges to combat.

But Hales did nothing of the sort. He kept his hands slack, turning over the job-sheets. By the clock he had been listening to Winter for less than five minutes; so it would have been merely absurd to remark that it was getting late and he must hurry away into the shop.

He thought that perhaps the telephone would divert them and interrupt them presently, for nothing else was likely to put an end to his drivel. The outer doors were closed for the night and the fire doors into the shop. It could be two hours before anyone came in—or three. Or no one might come all night; or for a dozen nights. The fellow had been silent for some seconds, however, so that his drivelling might have exhausted itself.



But it had not.

"Another funny item I can tell you about," he said, and shuffled down the one step from the cubicle to the outer floor, towards his ultimate going home. "I happened to pass the remark to you—when was it? Yesterday?—about Mr. Hudson."

Hales waited.

"It might be nothing," Winter went on. "And it might be a bit more. As you may have noticed, his old saloon was in on Friday for the usual. He told them at the office—in fact it was *me* he told at the job-window—myself, mark you—that he was going off up North for at least four days, and we could have till Tuesday for the job. Well. All right. He wanted a chap to go with him to the station to bring the car back. As it happened, I felt I could do with ten minutes' blow myself, so I hopped in with him. We hadn't gone a hundred yards when he said, 'I'm glad it's you who've come, Winter. You see, it may be that I shan't stay away till Tuesday, after all. So you might push this job through—just in case I need it before. It's awkward not having a car, don't you know?' I said, 'Yes'; and I thought, 'Why not have said Saturday instead of Tuesday on the job-sheet? Wouldn't have cost you anything.' You know the way toffs can say a thing to you—without really saying it?"

This was getting somewhere; so Hales made a sound in his throat, patiently, and lighted a cigarette.

Winter went on, "So he didn't say in so many words not to change the instructions on the sheet from Tuesday to Saturday. Too much of the gentleman to ask chaps like you and me to join him in a secret. So he just let it drop, for me to pick up if I'd sense enough. Well—he was back some time Sunday. I told you he was wide-awake, didn't I?"

Hales said "Yes."

"And now," said Winter, "our Mrs. Hudson."

Hales had been quietly thinking that he would, before very long, dig up some pretext for speaking to the Governor and going up to see him. Winter's last sentence cut sharply into this thought, and he looked abruptly from the smoke curling through his fingers from his newly-lighted cigarette into the face of Winter. It was smiling.

"Yes," said Winter, "and if you could have seen the



calm way she done it. Enough to make you split yourself laughing." He did not split himself; but he did laugh, before continuing, with the solemnity proper to narrative. "She sailed in about eleven this morning. I happened to be out at the pumps, having a look over the boys. She took eight gallons."

Hales made no comment.

Winter went on. "I daresay it would of been water on a duck's back to you, ol' man; because you've never had a sister-in-law with an uncle to spend week-ends with. But even you will take a bit of notice when I tell you she *paid* for the eight gallons."

"And why the hell," said Hales, "shouldn't she pay for it?"

"Oh, boy!" said Winter and the lid of one eye slid downwards slowly—"but why should she? Isn't there an account on which she could have booked it, as she always does?"

Hales offered no answer.

Winter expanded: "Listen, chum. She not only *paid* for it on the nail, but she turned—all innocent—to the boy, and said, 'Now you won't go and make any mistake and have it put on the bill, will you?' She'd hopped out of the Quail—as she always does—and was casting her eyes over it. 'Oh dear,' she said to me, 'the poor darling has got splashed. I've been away for the week-end, with friends near Beaconsfield.' 'Yes, ma'am,' I said; 'very nice part for so near to London. Pretty good roads too?' 'Yes aren't they?' says she, still sweet and innocent as ever. The mudguards, I may tell you, were caked on the underside about a foot thick with the kind of muck you might pick up in Devon or Cornwall—but *not* near Beaconsfield. 'I think I'll leave her with you for a couple of hours—for a wash and polish. I'll pay for that too. I only allow myself one a month on the bill for Mr. Hudson, and even that is sheer laziness—but I really haven't time to-day.' 'Yes, ma'am,' I said: 'Certainly I'll see she's ready for you in two hours. Wash, polish and grease.' 'Yes, please,' says she, 'and oil. She's beginning to use oil now. But you've got to expect that, I suppose, after the work she's done. And since the saloon is here,' she says next, 'I might as well take it to do my shopping.' But if there's any little surprise packets to be given, I thought, let 'em give them



who's been saving them up. 'I'm very sorry, ma'am,' I said. 'We've been a bit rushed over the week-end; and Mr. Hudson didn't ask for the saloon to be ready till this evening.' 'Oh well, never mind,' says she: and she hopped across the road for a tram like a two-year-old, and on to it."

"Well," said Hales, in a lordly manner, "finished?"

It was Winter's clownish attempts at mimicry of Mrs. Hudson that set Hales's gorge working so that he could hardly squeeze the words through it.

"I have finished all right," said Winter. "But I shouldn't think her ladyship has. She and her buckshee couple hundred miles that won't show on the bill for the old man to look at! And the wash and polish to get rid of the muck of hard driving. Suppose it was to take a run out to Beaconsfield himself that Mr. Hudson wanted the saloon yesterday, if there is some place there that she was supposed to be, and wasn't—like a rich old uncle?"

"And suppose he found that she was there?" said Hales. It was only a gesture on his part; a lubbering movement as of a landsman trying to fend himself from a bumping into something by reason of a current or sudden gust of wind, trying to parry with the skill of a sailor.

He had failed.

"Knowing what I happened to know already," said Winter, "it was up to me to have a look into pockets and under cushions and that, instead of letting those boys get their noses in. You know what *they* are——" He fumbled in his waistcoat-pocket and produced a small yellow paper which he unfolded, and proceeded to scrutinise. "Just as well"—he said—"or it might turn out to be just as well—that I did take a glance through. Beaconsfield!" and he laughed. Then he read from the paper: "City of Exeter. Parking."

Quite peaceably he handed the paper to Hales.

Hales felt himself to be in an emergency. In emergencies something has to be done; and quickly. He had no means of knowing what the something was—or whether it was much or little. All he did know was that he could not have done it. He could handle none of the tools that geniuses like Winter—and like the Governor too—could handle with such glibness in such emergencies. If he had tried, he could only have made another botch of it, like



his idiotic "Suppose he found that she was there . . ." playing into his hands again, causing that smile on Winter's face to stick there; even to expand.

He looked at the parking-slip and about the cubicle, and at Winter's leer and at his hand held out for the return of the paper. From Winter's hand he looked down to the corner by the door. There he did see one tool to his hand that he was magnificently able to wield. It was light, as such things go; almost dainty. So dainty, indeed, that he had so far scorned (or forgotten) to give it the personal trial which he had promised to the young traveller who had lodged in one of the bedrooms and been so enthusiastic for his new line as to exhibit this sample towards one midnight and to insist on leaving it here, in the corner of Hales's cubicle.

It was a seven-pound sledge-hammer.

Its head was stainless steel and its shaft a delicate tube. A fittingly posh little tool, the traveller said, for a posh garage like the "Never-Sleep"; and its greatest point was a detail not visible to the eye—its 'cushion-neck'. Hales had smiled at the boy. Cushion-neck, indeed! Tubular shaft! . . . For the art of using any tool must always lie in allowing the tool to do its work—so that 'cushion-necks' and other such frills were only for amateurs. A sledge-hammer was like a golf club. It was only the un-skill of forcing it and "sweating on it" that made any sort of 'cushion' necessary, and a 'cushion' could only save the wrist when it was a ham-hand on one side of it and a stiffened arm on the other. . . . But argument with the traveller had been useless. He had a pat answer for everything, and even went into figures. Hales said that in any case there were no young ladies in his workshop; and that sledge-hammers of any sort were a practically obsolete tool . . . Very well then, said the young man, would he try it and see for himself one evening, just once? And Hales said he would.

He did. With one hand.

Winter saw the stainless head curve through the air. He did not flinch—as he would not have flinched if the clock had suddenly begun to make faces at him. He would merely have watched it with wonder—as he watched the hammer-head till it was hidden by the peak of his cap.

There was no jar whatever upon the wrist of Hales.



The timing of the blow was perfect, and his grip upon the shaft was shortened into perfect adjustment for the impact required, exactly, for the job. Nothing was wasted. Winter folded up, reminding him of a two-foot rule—at his knees and his waist. Then, curiously, he was straight out again, lying on his side, hard against the edge of the shadow from the new girder.

The noise made under the hammer had been rather surprising. You would have thought that a tweed cap on one side and brains on the other would have made a more effective silencer.

But there was a sharp snap, as of the cracking of an enormous nut.

As, indeed, it was.

Hales replaced the hammer in its corner by the door. After a time he drew his bunch of keys from his pocket. He isolated the showroom key, and then hesitated a moment before switching off the light. He measured and fixed the position of Winter in his mind; for he did not want to go tripping over him, and very little light filtered in from the front of the lower showroom.

As an alternative to the actions of finding the key and switching off the light he could have stood where he was, continuing to stare at Winter.

But the Governor had to be told.

So he switched off the light, stepped over Winter, and went up to tell him.

## CHAPTER XX

THE Governor, for his part, was thankful for the first time in his life that he had spent two hundred and forty-odd pounds on the rubber flooring in the upper showroom. Footfalls made not the ghost of a sound upon it as he moved from the steps at the bottom of his lift into the corner of the car-lift, where he stood till Hales had gone by him, and up.

When the Governor had come out of his lift he was once more arrested, as he generally was, by the effect of the light above the cubicle. It was playing now on Hales and Winter, on the desk-top with its papers and black glint of telephone and inkpots, on the cheek-bones and nose and



chin of Hales. In a dim past it was precisely upon such matters as these that Ingle had meditated—upon shadows and high-lights and half-lights—"values", as they had called them; on cheek-bones and noses and jaws, on the poise of heads and the fall of draperies about a shoulder or a knee.

He stopped to behold these things as presented to him by the shadowed back of Winter and the lighted front of Hales. Pausing, his mind swerved from lights and shadows and the values pertaining thereto to other "values" less easily recorded.

They were a droll couple those two. Oil and water. It was surprising to see them engaged in quiet talk. Winter, as was to be expected in the unexpected circumstances of their being engaged in any talk at all, was doing the talking. Hales, naturally enough, was looking stumped and bothered.

He saw Winter fumble for something, and unfold it till it was a piece of orangey-yellow paper. Hales took it, and read it; and hit Winter on the head with a long hammer.

Shouting to the fellow would have done no good. The scream of a siren could not have extinguished the flash of that hammer-head through the air.

Then Hales shuffled into the showroom and up the stairs; and Ingle stood aside to let him pass.

The Governor, the housekeeper told Hales, had said he was going downstairs for a few moments. If Hales had not met him, or seen him, he had obviously walked down by the fire-escape as he so often did when the fancy took him and the evening was fine.

Very well, said Hales; he would wait for him to come back.

He found that he still had in his hand the yellow parking-slip that Winter had given him; so he laid it on the Governor's desk.

The next moment he was doubling across the central passage of the Governor's flat, back to the lift; for there had come up to the soles of his feet and to the atmosphere about him as he stood gaping at the Governor's desk and at the piece of yellow paper, a most peculiar vibration and tremor. It was like the shake, in a dug-out, of the impact of a distant, or a dud, shell.

Always Hales had been a little anxious over the brackets



of the line-shafting at the machine end of the shop. "Anxious" perhaps is not the word; for it was not for him to say, when the job had been a contract in the hands of a firm of outside engineers. But he had never been able to give up feeling that a fifty-horse-power motor could give a substantial jerk (from rest) against a sticky load . . . and there now was that tremor and vibration to show that something at last had given and crashed.

From the steps at the bottom of the Governor's lift he saw that the light had been switched on again, and men were legging it out of the workshop, to join a group by the cubicle door.

He went on, down the stairs.

At the door of the lower showroom he found himself upon the heels of the Governor.

The door would not open more than a foot or eighteen inches—just sufficient to let the Governor through.

It was held there by the end of the fallen girder.

When he, too, had squeezed through and followed him half-way to the crowd by the cubicle, the Governor turned to him. "There!" he snapped. "What did I tell you? It *has* crashed . . . !" and immediately afterwards Hargreaves butted into them with, "It got Mr. Winter, sir; just pole-axed 'im neatly and then chucked him clear. Another six inches and it would have got his legs and smashed them up too. Not that it would have mattered . . ." He was thoughtful as he spoke.

Someone, straightening his back after stooping, and wiping his hand on the leg of a polished overall, said quietly, "Pore bugger."

Ginger and Charlie and Titch among the crowd were mute. Nought but utter silence could be their alternative to argument; and for argument this was neither the time nor place.

There was nothing, it seemed, within the whole range of human function for which it was the time or place. There was Winter—dead as a door-nail; and there was the four-ton girder, mute and inert as Winter after its fall of eighteen feet. Men looked from one property of the drama to the other; and they looked at the splintered surface of the concrete floor where the girder's end had struck it. Hargreaves alone followed, with his mind, the observations recorded by his eye. The others just stood, saying nothing,



and quite still, until someone started them all fumbling into shirt and trouser-pockets under overalls and bibs, and behind ears, for whole cigarettes in packets, and for stumps of cigarettes half-smoked. But Hargreaves moved his eye from the broken floor to Winter's head, and back again from the head to the floor.

"You'd have thought, sir," he said, "that if it done that to a slab of concrete . . ." it was to all of them a problem of mechanics now; and their attention focused upon the orderly aspect of Winter. Hargreaves had let the cap fall forward again to cover the damage and the staring eyes, so that the only sign of disarrangement about Winter was the discoloration of his cap—at the top and above his temples and ears—and the puddle in which the back of his head rested. The ivory-whiteness of his throat and cheek-bones became grey at his chin and jowls by reason of the stipple of his beard. ". . . and it hasn't even shifted his cap," Hargreaves continued, "not what you might really call *shifted* it. *Bulged* it a bit, perhaps; but that was more the brains done that than the knock itself. So if he hadn't been on the move, or ducked away——"

"I expect you would duck all right," someone suggested, "if you felt a little lot like that coming on."

"Yes," said Ginger, "and don't forget a chap isn't like a floor. He ain't dead solid. There's a bit of extra give in a chap standing up, isn't there?" He had turned to Hales, as he always turned to him for support in his technical, more serious arguments.

Hales said, "Yes, there is a bit of *give*."

Ingle now spoke. "I suppose none of you fellows actually *saw*—anything?"

Ginger, they explained, was the first to get in, as he was working nearest the door; but it was all over by then. Hales was the only one who would have been at all likely to have seen it; but Hales, as the Governor very well knew, was upstairs with himself. . . .

Hargreaves stepped a little way from the speakers, towards the showroom where the floor was broken, and picked up something and thoughtfully said, "'Ullo . . ."

The Governor joined him, and took the thing and examined it and said, "It is funny. A tyre-lever. Looks as though it might belong to the old Buick up there." They all looked up to the gallery which was the Upper Show-



room. "The jar must have been enough to shake it out of the second-hand kit-bin. It's right on the edge just where the end of the girder was."

"The jar," said Ginger very solemnly, "was enough to shake the eye-teeth out of a chap's head, let alone a tyre-lever off of a shelf."

So much, the Governor thought, for the confounded tyre-lever, about which he had been rather wondering. For he had had to let it go when the shifting of the girder had pinched it against the pillar and tugged at it—or else go sailing through the air with it.

He slipped it into his pocket.

"Well," he said. "Someone had better ring up Dr. Thompson and tell him there's been an accident. The insurance people will probably sue the contractors for negligence. . . . Anyhow, nothing must be moved till the doctor's seen it all. You chaps go back to your jobs now. Mr. Hales and I will wait for the doctor. And Hargreaves"—Hargreaves came forward and Ingle lowered his voice—"it's been a shock to everyone, this. They're under thirty, don't forget—most of them. Sudden death and broken heads and a great big bang are apt to get on their nerves, if you're not careful and tactful. Just help them along with their work—Hales will come in presently. Oh, by the way, I left my golf clubs with that fat youngster on the petrol-pump about an hour ago, to rub up for me. He looked a bit green just now, as he went out. He ought to be made busy. You might tell him to do the clubs at once and bring me the bag as soon as he's finished. It shouldn't take more than ten minutes."

"Very good, sir," said Hargreaves. "I'll do what I can to cheer them up, till Mr. Hales comes."

Truly, thought Ingle, language is a peculiar affair. "Cheer them up . . ." And the words that had voiced the shock at the bottom of a startled heart—the words that were voicing it now no doubt in a dozen such hearts, or a score of them—were "pore bugger".

"*De mortuis . . .*" and there was Hales, standing alone now, his eyes fixed upon the sliding together of the workshop doors: Hales, wishing that he were any one of the twenty-odd wearers of overalls upon whom, and peace, those doors were closing; biting a finger-nail as though he were a chattering squirrel and the nail a nutshell; wishing



to God that it had been upon his own suddenly exposed brains that something heavy had fallen. . . . And if he sent him upstairs on any pretext, the sort of thing which the fool might quite well do next would be to take a seventy-foot header from the parapet.

*"Nil nisi bonum. . . ."*

Aloud Ingle said, "Poor Winter." But that, he noticed, was a threnody less accurate than that accorded by those who had been the underlings of the departed soul, while that soul had worn bright tan shoes, trousers that were tight to his spindling legs and a cap that made sinister his cadaverous features. They had used a term of wide and generous application, maintaining in their compassion a breadth and a depth of universality, which his own small "poor Winter" had missed. His comment was upon the chance that had thrust one small individual under the notice of a few others. Theirs was the voice of Man faced with the enigma of Man's destiny. He looked upon Winter with the sudden hole at the top of his skull. To them was shown the mystery of the union of Clay with the breath of God; of the same Clay with the breath banged suddenly out of it.

"Hales," he said, and moved nearer to him; more softly, but portentously, he next said: "*Listen!*" This, he knew, was sheer melodrama, for the fellow was already bursting his ear-drums with listening for something, as he was eating off his finger-nail. "You've made a mistake."

Hales, for whom there was nothing else in the world to say, said: "Yes, sir."

Ingle said: "Yes. A very great mistake indeed. You said that girder wouldn't crash. I said it might. It *did*; and there you are. And there it is. And there's no more to be said about it. Not anyone. Ever. It's finished with. See?"

Hales again said: "Yes, sir."

"And now go on into the shop," said Ingle. "And ginger that damned boy up with my golf-bag. I mean, ginger everyone up with everything."

Since language was now reduced to precisely two words, Hales again said "Yes, sir," and went.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Doctor Thompson came and had taken a single



glance at Winter, all he asked for was a piece of chalk. While the chalk was being brought from the workshop he rang up the hospital for the ambulance. While waiting for his number he made some comment on Ingle's golf-bag standing in the corner; possibly, if he had not been holding the telephone, he would have tampered with it. Ingle explained that he had played a round that afternoon and had left the clubs for one of the boys to clean. The boy had just brought it back.

The full weight of its leaning was supported by the head and neck of the driver. So he took the bag away and laid it down—out of the doctor's way and where a slight bulge in it was not so noticeable—outside the cubicle.

The man who brought the chalk was sent back by Dr. Thompson to see if he could find some sawdust.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hales came back in about an hour. The Governor was gone. Dr. Thompson was gone. Winter was gone. The place last occupied by him in the "Never-Sleep" was recorded by a chalk outline upon the floor enclosing approximately a recumbent human shape and the words "DO NOT TOUCH"; and some sawdust adhering to a small patch of stickiness.

The Governor's golf-bag was gone; gone also was the sample sledge-hammer.

## CHAPTER XXI

A SERIOUS argument arose between the Company which carried the "Never-Sleep's" Insurance against employers' liability, and the steel construction contractors: but it was settled out of court. There is already prejudice enough against new methods and new laws of stress and strain and span and stability; against new materials. No human being, or no group of human beings who are Directors and Shareholders of a company as well as men of scientific thought, is anxious to assert in open court that a girder will not—because it cannot—move two or three inches and fall to the killing of a man when the girder has, in point of fact, so fallen. There was the girder—fallen; and there, beside it, had been the man—dead.



Half a score of men had given the same evidence at the inquest that another half-score would have given if they had been called: the first thing they knew of it was the crash, and all they knew of it was that Winter was lying beside the girder. Doctor Thompson certified that death had been caused by an impact fracturing the skull and impinging upon the upper part of the right frontal lobe of the brain. It had been instantaneous. Normal reflexes would have caused the body to lurch away, clear of the girder, since the direction of the girder's fall would have been perpendicular. Alternatively, if the girder's fall had been not absolutely perpendicular but slightly parabolic, that itself would account for the fact that only the top of the unfortunate man's head had been struck and the rest of him untouched.

Ingle's evidence, being merely corroborative, was negligible. He did not actually enter upon the scene of the accident—followed by his night foreman, Hales—till after even the petrol-boys, who had had to run all the way round the building and come through the back entrance, the canteen and the workshops. He could therefore add absolutely nothing to the evidence of his employees. The man, Hales, was away in Coventry now on technical business for the firm. The Coroner did not, however, think that his evidence would have been of any value. . . .

And the underwriters of the Company carrying the Steel Contractors' risk against third party claims were associated with the Company carrying the "Never-Sleep's" Employers' liability.

The publicity value of a sheer hullabaloo in court was considered by the Steel Company; but it was agreed that the only kind of publicity worth while would be publicity to prove that the girder had not, in fact, fallen at all, but was still in position. Proof, in other words that the foreman was not dead.

\* \* \* \* \*

And what did Ingle get out of it all?

He wondered.

Peace. . . . Funny sort of peace, being the only source of possible information against a murderer. . . . Not exactly what some people would call "security". However, he was accomplice after the fact, or accessory to the fact, or



something of the sort. Anyhow, he too, was in the soup, if Hales only had the sense to see it. But "sense" was hardly a quality to be looked for in Hales, who had been as mad as a hatter for the instant in which he swung that hammer. Obviously he had meant no harm, for there was no harm in him. He had killed Winter as you or I might kill a fly—from irritation and sheer annoyance. He had just picked up a swatter and swatted him—after receiving the piece of yellow paper which he himself had found, when he brought Dr. Thompson up for a drink, lying on his desk. The paper had fogged him till he noticed that it referred to the parking of a vehicle recorded with an attendant's hieroglyphics that looked as though they might be "Quail". But the number was clear enough; and a reference to the Hudsons' account showed that the car was Phyllida's.

This had fogged him still more, till Kempthorne had told him that he had had to postpone a full examination of Mrs. Hales because he had had to be away for the week-end—in Devonshire.

And now he wondered which of them was right and reasonable in their conduct of this love business—he, or Hales, or Kempthorne. He himself had not been such a fool as ever to do anything about it. He doubted whether any man's criticism of her—or of anything in the world—would have prompted him to slaughter, or even to mild assault and battery. He had done nothing; and would go on doing nothing; for perhaps he had discovered an altogether new kind of love which demanded of the lover only that he should love—and loving, whichever way you looked at it, was no more than a kind of contemplation. It demanded not that he should press his services upon her as a flunky or a general sort of caddy; that he should undertake the feeding, clothing and housing of her. . . . These details were all very well and quite enjoyable. But not essential. They were the yearning to sire her progeny, and for the entertainment attached thereto. That was it—entertainment. All power to them if they could get it—as Basil Kempthorne managed to get it from time to time without disturbing anyone else, or himself. Hudson the solemn, would probably take a different view of it if he ever found out.

Hales had been anxious about this individual's appearance on his own lawn. So Ingle, after the braining of



Winter, had rung Hudson up on some pretext or other, and mentioned that he had not, it seemed, stayed away for the week-end in Edinburgh; and Hudson had tittered in a manly, coy tone and mumbled something about keeping things to one's self—don't-you-know: Phyllida had been away for a stretch of four nights with cousins at Beaconsfield, and he, Hudson, had—well—come back to town to see a man about a dog. . . . Old Nooks would understand. . . .

He did; and it struck him that Hudson was the perfect sort for sailing after Terpsichorean or secretarial fluff at recurring moments. And he was the right age, too; the same age as Ingle himself. All power to him also. . . . But if sane men and women would realise that entertainment was no more than entertainment. It is a jolly enough thing; just as strawberries are a jolly thing. The art of it, the culture and rapturous enjoyment of it might be the handmaid of love; but they are not Love itself any more than the desire for strawberries and the culture and rapturous eating of strawberries are the science and art of botany. . . . So his own luck in the matter was the luck of the botanist who may not eat strawberries as Kempthorne was able to eat them, and to confide in him, Ingle, five years ago, that he was so eating them.

And he had got Kempthorne to say that he would not play about with Mrs. Hales in the Interests of Science and the Cause of Discovery. The case, on full examination, had been a disappointment to Kempthorne. He had thought, at first—talking to Hales and to Thompson—that he had stumbled upon something for which he had long been waiting. . . . "And so," Ingle had said, "having seen that what you have caught is not the rare insect, but a common cabbage butterfly—you are willing to let it go?"

"She couldn't live in any case, you know," was Kempthorne's answer.

This was proved to be true by the fact that she died two days later, comfortably and happily.

And still Ingle did not see where he came into it all. Out of his Botany he got no strawberries. He did not even hit people on the head with a hammer from some motive darkly and dimly and distantly connected with those strawberries, and a hunger of his own therefore. All he got out of his Botany was—Botany.



Hales came back on the night-shift again since day-work seemed likely to make a physical wreck of him. Hargreaves was doing the job of Winter. Hales was booked to teach young Hudson to drive, from six o'clock till seven, as soon as the school holidays started. . . .

Soon the contract would be made concerning the fan-belt pulley about which Hales had been to Coventry. The "Never-Sleep" did not intend to sell the patent or any licence under it. Hales had shown how they could make the thing themselves; or how, at any rate, they could machine and finish the forgings for it. As to space, they had it already—the fifty feet by thirty-four around the cubicle, to be spanned soon by the new floor of the upper showroom. . . .

These were some of the thoughts of his meditation as he drove back to "the place" after dining with the Hudsons one night—"Bandy" Hudson, as they had called him at school, and Phyllida, who could pass men by and leave them somewhat better for it, warmed and a little hungry; she who had launched no thousand ships, but had sent one weapon hurtling through the air in the hand of a Northern Prude defending adultery, upon the skull of a dirtyish rascal who must, presumably, have jibed at some fault he found therein.

Ingle had looked at Hudson more than once during the evening and thought how right it would be, by all the laws of poetry and justice, for Hales to know that the pompous old beggar had come sneaking back that Sunday for the perfectly innocent purpose of a spot of mischief of his own. But the secret of life, he was convinced, was to leave things alone. The more you love them, the more you should leave them alone. . . .

The sign looked well in the sky above the white, floodlit slab of the "Never-Sleep".

Ingle slowed down to look upon it, and stopped his car against the kerb at the top of the hill before the dip and the twist in the road and the bottle-neck of the railway bridge blotted out all but the pink glow above the sky-sign. He could see how the shell of it would grow, to fit a bigger body and a bigger soul when they were making the fan-belt pulleys. More work, unceasing and unstinted in its flow, for twenty-four hours in three hundred and sixty-five days in every year. Work, that alone could take a husk



from the queue at a labour exchange, and give to it *things* and make of it a man.

More sons for Solomon.

And so Solomon stopped the engine of his car for a moment, and savoured his glory.

No policeman or coroner or magistrate could leave his portly pacings to and fro, to meddle in the destiny of his sons; neither could a cancer specialist.

The sons of Solomon were men apart. A hand was protecting them against the interference of policemen, the footling of magistrates and the pedantries of scientists—and the hand was Solomon's own.

**THE END**